AN EXAMINATION OF WRITING PRACTICES IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of writing in Newfoundland high schools with a view to enhancing and diversifying that role. The writer's interest in the issue was prompted by an analysis of writing practices and teacher attitudes to writing in one Newfoundland school district (see appendices). This interest led to a review of relevant literature on the role of writing. Since only a very few theses have dealt with writing in Newfoundland high schools, the study includes references to comparable situations throughout the western world.

The writer was guided by four questions: What is the state of writing in Newfoundland high schools? Why should writing be taught? Why is writing not being taught more effectively? What can we do to give writing more prominence in our high schools?

Answers to these four questions were arrived at through references to literature and to the writer's personal experiences as a high school teacher. To the first of these questions the writer concludes that writing is not being well taught. To the second question he concludes that writing should be taught by all teachers for the variety of benefits it can bring to students, including self-fulfillment, improved post-secondary opportunities, and most importantly, vastly improved learning of subject matter.

The third question, of why writing is not used more effectively, revealed these factors, among others: teacher workload, misconceptions about the nature and the need for writing, subject area specialization and the difficulty of evaluating writing.

In response to the fourth question, the writer has attempted to explain how writing can be given more prominence through teacher education, stress on reading, the development of writing across the curriculum, and renewed evaluation practices.

The study concludes with a discussion of evaluation of writing as it is and as it should be done and gives recommendations for improving the state of writing.

Acknowledgements

Despite his protestations of being no more than an "old fashioned school teacher", Frank Wolfe is the embodiment of all that I would like to see in a professor. He is scholarly, dedicated, considerate of students, and thrives on their learning. He is always willing to listen and always prompt with feedback. He is more than a competent advisor, he is a friend. If that makes an old fashioned school teacher, then I want to be one too. In all sincerity, thank you Dr. Wolfe.

I offer a special note of thanks to Maureen Connolly, whose advice and praise were freely given and gratefully accepted.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form.
>
> Walter, J. Ong, 1985

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Writing still does not hold the place it deserves in many high schools throughout this province. Admittedly, there have been some attempts at developing a sense of importance of writing, through the English Language and Literature courses in the Reorganized High School Program. The course outlines for these subjects suggest that teachers follow "the writing process" and suggest a minimum number of written assignments that students should complete. Despite that, writing is still largely not taught, or too often poorly taught. It is still seen as the domain of English teachers only, and the phrase "writing across the curriculum" has been one, to borrow a phrase from Macbeth, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". So too, I submit, has become the very concept of "the writing process" as outlined in Senior High English course guides.

What Kelly (1982) said of English courses still applies to today's high schools:

> New programmes (not necessarily progressive programmes) are developed, English teachers' conferences come and go, school years come and go, students come and go, yet things remain unchanged. (p. 70)

The reader might at this point note that children seem to do a lot of writing - as a matter of fact they seem to be writing something throughout most of their school days. The questions are, though: What are they writing? Why are they writing? For whom are they writing? The answers are that they are all too often writing short (less than a paragraph), fill-the-blank type factual answers; to show off their capacity for rote memorization; for their classroom teacher as evaluator.

Again, the reader might ask, "Well what is wrong with that?" Is not that the way teachers and students have always used writing? For goodness sake, you are not telling us not to have students write, are you?

Most assuredly not! I am saying that students must write much more often, more substantially, more freely, more creatively, more purposefully, for more audiences. They must use writing to help them learn all content materials, to develop originality of thought, and to enhance their powers of thinking. They must especially use writing more extensively in all areas of their curriculum, not just in English classes.

Are Newfoundland schools any worse off than other schools in this regard? The answer is "probably not", but they may be late in trying to do something about the problem. Being late in adapting new ideas is perhaps what Newfoundland teachers have been too ready to accept, but it is not quite excusable when we have at our disposal a wide body of literature documenting the writing problems identified and solutions proposed in jurisdictions such as England, Scotland, New Zealand, the United States, and in other parts of Canada. We should be in a position to benefit from the experiences of these other places, but thus far we have largely failed to take advantage of them.

How does the situation in this province resemble what was (or is) true in other parts of the world? What evidence is there that writing is not being used effectively, or not being used at all? Why should students write? If they should, why are they not doing so? What is to be done about the problem of a lack of writing, if indeed there is a problem? All of these are relevant questions, not because they have bothered me through most of my eighteen-year career as an English Department Head in a Newfoundland high school, but because they are global concerns that have implications for all high schools in this province.

Method

The answering of these questions will provide both the substance and the direction of this study. In doing so, I will appeal to the reader from the perspectives of personal experience, anecdotal evidence, phenomenological reflections and representative selections from the vast amount of literature on writing.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to stimulate awareness of the problem with writing, and to begin in a small way the restoration of the process of writing to its rightful place in the Newfoundland high school curriculum.

What Is the Current State of Writing in High Schools?

There is a story of a Newfoundlander who went to Boston during the Depression to seek employment. After giving his home address as "Newfoundland", he was asked by the interviewer, "What state is that in?"

"In a state of starvation when I left it", replied the Newfoundlander.

Starvation is really no joke, but it may be a useful metaphor for the state of writing in this province. Starvation is normally thought of in terms of a deficiency

of food for the body, but the metaphorical starvation hence is a deficiency of food for the minds of young students. There are many kinds of food for the body, yet only certain foods provide protein, the substance needed for physical growth. Likewise, there are plenteous foods for the mind, such as television, radio, newspapers, books, discussions, lectures, music and art, yet only writing may provide that food needed for special sorts of intellectual and personal growth. Thus, given the apparent scarcity of writing in Newfoundland high schools, there may be starvation of too many young minds.

How does that starvation of writing manifest itself? It shows itself in classrooms wherever content area teachers give too-frequent objective tests, or fill-in the blank tests, and too few essay type tests, as it has showed itself in England (Britton 1975), in Canada (Fillion 1979), in America (Applebee 1981 and 1985) and in Scotland (Spencer 1983). It shows itself where students write only to display their knowledge to a teacher as evaluator (Applebee 1981, Fulwiler 1984). It shows itself in classrooms wherein students are not given the opportunity to write freely on topics that interest them, rather than on teacher-assigned topics (Elbow 1973, Allen, 1982, Olson 1985). It manifests itself when English teachers spend far too much time and effort trying to teach grammar rules, to the detriment of writing, while mistakenly believing that learning of grammar is

prerequisite to learning to write (Bullock 1975, Allen 1982, Elley, et al. 1976).

But what of the state of writing here in the Newfoundland high school system? Yes, here too, ineptitude or misinformation keeps the writing of students to a minimum, and hinders its adoption in various content areas (Fagan 1980). On a survey I conducted, more than 80% of all teachers in one school district admitted that for them, writing was a little used tool in their classrooms. Informal discussions with several teachers from various high schools throughout the province confirmed what this writer suspected: the malaise which apparently infects the state of writing can be found in schools small and large, rural and urban. Only one school thus encountered was found to be working on a language across the curriculum policy, which of necessity embodied a writing policy (Furey, 1987).

Further evidence of the demise of writing in Newfoundland high schools is suggested by often lack-lustre performance on public examinations, particularly those in English language and literature. I often wonder, though, whether some of this difficulty is attributable to poor questioning on these exams. A further witness to the lack of writing in the high schools is the typical first year student at Memorial University who, after all those years of schooling, cannot approximate even a barely acceptable level of essay writing (Francis 1986).

Throughout high schools, and even into fourth level university English courses, students demand notes and structure of the sort which would allow them to learn by rote (Wolfe 1987). I submit that such rote learning - and the demand for it - is promoted in high schools by the use of short answer and objective type questions on a daily basis.

High school teachers frequently complain about students who are unable to write. The same teachers complain just as loudly about students who just cannot seem to think. These teachers, out of frustration or perhaps out of lack of acquaintance with recent research findings, fail to see a subtle irony in their complaints. It is just a bit ironic that teachers fail to see the possibility that students cannot write because teachers have not taught them to write. It is even more ironic that teachers fail to realize that there is a strong relationship between learning to write and learning to think. The frustration in the former instance likely comes not from a lack of teacher effort, but rather from a misdirection of efforts. The lack of acquaintance with research in the second instance probably comes not from teacher apathy, but rather from a lack of direction or perhaps even from stagnation due to lack of incentive to read and/or to upgrade qualifications.

Whatever the reasons for poor writing and for poor teaching of writing, it is apparent that poor teaching of

writing exists in this province, as it has in the United States, as Knoblauch and Brannon tell us.

> Writing is often taught as though it were a mechanical act of selecting prefabricated forms for preconceived content; as though it were nothing but a range of technical skills to be delivered by masters to apprentices through lecture, then memorized and practiced until proficiency is achieved; as though human beings lack verbal competence until teachers provide them with it; as though the surface decorum of texts were more valuable than quality of thought; indeed as though decorum were equivalent to intellectual quality. (p. 4)

It would be interesting, and hopefully instructive, to answer the question of why writing is not being done, but surely before doing that, one needs to explain why writing should be done. After all, if there is no need or apparent purpose for writing in schools, then who cares about why it is not being done?

Thankfully, there are many who do care about the place of writing in schools - parents, administrators, some teachers in English and in content areas, prospective employers, quite a few high school students, and you, the reader, for a lack of care would prevent your reading of this thesis. With your indulgence, I will point out a number of reasons for writing, from the viewpoints of writers both amateur and professional, young and old, historical and modern, neophytes and scholars.

The chapter to follow will have two separate, yet in some ways complementary, parts. The first part will consist of a review of the literature on the question of why teachers should teach writing.

The second part will consist of anecdotal evidence and phenomenological reflections on the need for writing. In neither instance should the evidence given be considered totally exhaustive. Rather, the entries are representative of the most trustworthy authorities on writing - people who actually engage themselves in the process of writing at all the levels alluded to above. In that sense then, I hope the two divisions will complement each other and answer the question of why writing should be taught.

CHAPTER II

WHY WRITING SHOULD BE TAUGHT

> The child's economic world is a wonderful place, in which everybody is doing things because he wants to do them.
>
> Stephen Leacock, 1944

What the Literature Says About Writing

Writing Is Natural

"Writing is a very natural act; children want to write from a very young age and can do so long before they learn such conventions as spelling, and perhaps even long before they enter school" (Graves 1982). Part of the writing problem may well be that the school experiences of children destroy their natural desire to write, so that by the time they reach high school they have lost this natural desire or at least have suppressed it for a multitude of reasons.

Squire (1983) said, "the urge to write and communicate is more natural than the urge to read, and it needs to be nourished from the time children first enter school" (p. 228). That children do have this need to communicate should be obvious to any teacher of kindergarten. Milz (1980) also gives evidence that even kindergarten children can write, and want to write. This writer has seen children in grade one write very engaging

stories, and even picture books. They use the device of invented spelling (Graves 1982) to get over the "need" for spelling. Once an adult learns, with the child's help, to break this invented spelling code, which might look like this: "GNYS AT WRK (Genius at Work)" (Bissex, 1980), he cannot fail to see that children can write and want to write. Not too long ago there would have been many teachers who would have scoffed at the very notion of children writing so early in their school careers, but people are gradually accepting the reality that young children can indeed write.

If the urge to write is a natural one in young children, could teachers assume that this urge can be rekindled in older children and used to further their communicative abilities? Teachers in high schools would then be able to help their students realize that writing is a natural art, and help them make full use of its potential.

The list of reasons for writing is a rather exhaustive one. Some of the benefits of learning to write and practicing writing are what may be termed "intangibles". Among these are: self-fulfillment, therapy, escape from reality, and a sense of power over language. Other benefits are more obvious. These include preservation of one's culture, increased educational and employment opportunities, improvement of writing abilities, and a considerable increase in the facility for

learning in all content areas in which writing is used effectively.

I will relate each of these to available literature and later, where possible, to anecdotal personal experiences in real classrooms.

Writing As Self-fulfillment

"Any work of writing confers its first benefit on its author. A student, writing what he wants to express, is creating his personality. He is discovering who he is and what it is he has to say" (Allen 1982, p. 15). Baker (1971) supports this concept of self-fulfillment through writing. He says: "In spite of the many electronic means of reaching our conceptual life, we must remember that nothing so searching engages the individual's mind, and soul, as trying to put himself on paper. Nothing so pleases as finding himself, there" (p. 16).

The need for self-actualization is one of the five basic human needs as postulated by Abraham Maslow (1966). If that need can be met by writing, then teachers would be advised to encourage students to write. How such writing can be developed will be discussed later in this thesis.

Writing As Therapy

Brand (1980) in her book, Therapy in Writing, makes a well documented case for the use of writing as therapy. She reviewed the use of writing as therapy from the time

of the ancient Greeks up until very recent times. Brand concluded:

> Fluency in writing may facilitate equivalent gains in self confidence. At a deeper level, writing enhances awareness; it helps individuals reorganize their inner selves; it contributes to personal integration and self affirmation. And of course, writing has its cathartic effects; it supplies emotional release. In truth then, the act of writing proffers broad therapeutic benefits. (p. 2)

Brand cites examples of how each of the following types of writing has been successfully used in therapy, by various practitioners: poetry, journals, diaries, letters, stories and notes. She is a firm believer in the ability of classroom teachers to use writing to help students with various sorts of psychological and personal problems, a view shared by this writer.

I have had successful experience with writing as therapy. Not all teachers would believe such a possible use of writing, however, and Brand was well aware of the problem. She said "Whether writing should primarily serve the personal development needs of students or whether it should serve informational, social, or purely cognitive functions is an issue that has surfaced repeatedly in American education" (p. 45).

There likely is no real need for such a tension, because it seems reasonable to assume that writing can serve all of these functions, concurrently and severally.

Writing As An Escape From Reality

Life is not always easy for adolescents. They live in an in-between world - too young on the one hand, and too old on the other. They are experiencing physical, mental and emotional growth, and there are persistent fears that one's growth patterns are slowed or even abnormal. Life is full of difficult, and often conflicting demands. Van Den Berg (1972) asks "Why is the attitude of an adolescent asymmetrical?" and then answers the question, "Because in his world there is nothing permanent; everything is dubious and there is no direction." (p. 57). Adolescents seek a release valve. Sadly, for some, the only release is suicide. Suicide is now the third largest cause of death for teenagers (Stupple, 1981, 64). For perhaps a lucky few, the outlet they seek comes through their writings. Adolescent girls, in particular, are inveterate keepers of diaries. Many others, of both sexes, write letters to advice columns, to pen pals, and to fan clubs. Still others turn to the writing of poetry or fiction for the release of tension, as Hayakawa (1978) puts it:

> From the point of view of the utterer, one of the most important functions of the utterance is the relieving of tensions... The novel, the drama, the poems, like the oath or the expletive, arise in part out of an internal necessity when the organism experiences a serious tension, whether resulting from joy, grief, disturbance or frustration. And as a result of the utterances made, the tension is, to a greater or lesser degree - perhaps only momentarily - mitigated. (p. 129)

Hayakawa (1978) further states that this "need" for escape from reality can be a fine source of literature. He gives the example of Edgar Rice Burroughs, a young man who, confined to his sick bed, escaped by writing the Tarzan adventure series (p. 132).

Other writers of greater repute also used writing as an escape from physical handicaps, and though the handicaps experienced by many adolescents might be fewer, the escape they turn to is quite often the act of writing. It is interesting that even those adolescents who choose suicide will so very often communicate their intentions or their reasons in writing. Other adolescents who have suicidal tendencies communicate their frustrations and thoughts in the form of poetry. I have had experience with such suicidal adolescents, and will discuss these later. The possibilities for writing as therapy seem worth pursuing in all high schools.

Writing Gives Power Over Language

"Reading and its necessary twin, writing, constitute not merely an ability but a power" (Barzun 1971, p. 21).

This power that Barzun mentions is power over the native language of the writer, the power to use it for communication and for personal growth and development. Richards elaborates on this development. "We learn through what we have learned. Some powers have to be

acquired before we can acquire others." (Richards 1971, p. 43)

Barzun (1971) echoes that idea: "It should have been obvious that self-expression is real only after the means to it have been acquired" (p. 22). This "means to self expression" is language, and Barzun believes that writing is the tool whereby people best develop this power over language and thus the power of self-expression. Bushman (1984) very appropriately summed up the importance of this sense of power to all students:

> The joy of discovering effective language and manipulating that language to express an idea creatively is a goal that should be attained and cherished in every writing class, whether that class be English or one of the many content area classes. (p. vii)

The "manipulating of language" Bushman referred to can best be accomplished in the act of writing, in which manipulating is very important. Speaking of the act of writing, Sartre (1965) said, "One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way" (p. 19). It is this "choosing to say things in a certain way" or "manipulating the language" that gives to the writer a sense of power over language.

The sense of power over language gained by students in high school cannot have the impact of that gained by beginning writers, as described by Richards (1971) but the pursuit of power over language would be a worthwhile one:

> The acquisition of this first manual-optical notation (writing) for verbal language can give the learner a new power of control over and check upon all that he has been managing hitherto so skillfully with ear and tongue. It can do more than this: It can offer him an instrument with which he can examine at another tempo and in another form for the first time the miracles he has been accomplishing fleetingly in speech. With written language and step-by-step through the process by which he learns its use, he can come into a new cognizance of what he has been talking of and hearing about only. He gains, in brief, means of exploring and comparing he never had before. (p. 67)

Adolescent writers need to be given plenty of opportunity to develop this facility for exploring and comparing, a facility best developed through instruction and practice in writing by interested teachers, who have a love for the language and a love for its power.

Writing Helps Preserve Culture

> All claims to the contrary notwithstanding, ours is still a written culture: our wisdom, our excellence, indeed our information, are for the most part still housed in such a way that only those who can handle the written form of language with facility can gain access to them. (Barrow 1982, p. 37).

Surely proper teaching of writing can and must provide all students with this access to the written culture. If not, the ability to write may become once again, as it was centuries ago, elitist. It may be so already, for Hendrix (1975) believes that "Writing ability is unevenly distributed in our society along class lines".

Hayakawa (1978) also relates the importance of writing to the preservation and the sharing of one's culture. He said that:

> To be able to read and write, therefore, is to learn to profit by and take part in the greatest of human achievements - that which makes all other achievements possible - namely the pooling of our experiences in great cooperative stores of knowledge, available (except where special privilege, censorship, or suppression stand in the way) to all. (p. 11)

His statement at once expounds the benefits of teaching writing, and reminds educators that class is not the only barrier to literacy. There are barriers of government privilege, censorship and oppression that are very real. Still, the positive aspect must be stressed- that knowledge of writing permits people both to contribute to and partake in, their culture.

Walcutt (In Baker et al., 1971) expresses a similar thought in metaphorical language. "The realms of gold, the hoardings of the world's great books, exist only in books and by virtue of the art of writing." (p. xiii).

Richards (In Baker et al., 1971) agrees with Walcutt. He said that "The command of the written mode of utterance with the increased control it gives man over his 'meants', has been the chief source of what is to be valued in civilization" (p. 75).

Thus writing should be taught for what it can and does contribute to our culture and civilization.

Writing Increases Post-secondary Opportunities

It has already been noted that college freshmen are expected to be able to write. Since some of the adolescent population will invariably go to college, then it seems necessary that someone teach them to write. In many instances young people are either accepted or rejected for college based on their ability to write coherently. As Corbett (In Whiteman, 1981) says, "Society can and does make some legitimate judgments about the quality of one's mind from the conditions of one's writing" (p. 50).

Hendrix (In Whiteman, 1981) tells us that there is much more writing required in the modern workplace than would be imagined by many people who feel writing to be a useless ability. He tells us that many stores, offices and the military have had to adopt training programs to build writing skills within their ranks.

Whiteman (1981) suggests that too many English teachers in particular do not know what kind of writing is required in the workplace. This may be an argument in favour of writing-across-the-curriculum, particularly in business or industrial arts courses, in which the instructors may help English teachers and their students with work specific writing skills.

Writing Improves Writing Ability

If you could recommend one thing to improve the quality of writing done by high school students, what would it be? The answer given by 75% of high school teachers in one school district was some variation of "give them more writing". Forgetting the apparent hypocrisy of recommending but not doing writing, it is interesting to note the degree of consensus about the usefulness of writing to improve writing. This notion has some support in the literature.

Tamura and Harstad (1987) say that the best way to have students write better is to have them write more (p. 256). They advocate the use of free writing as a writing tool for the learning of social studies.

Judy and Judy (1981) are very much in favour of the concept of learning to write by writing. They said:

> To us, the great body of research and informed speculation about writing (not to mention the common sense and collected experience of generations of teachers) points directly to the conclusion that writing is learned through experience; that is, writing is learned by writing. (p. 17)

Judy and Judy anticipate the question, "If people can learn to write by writing, then why do they not learn to write on their own?". They point out the fact that many professional writers claim they have learned to write on their own after unsuccessful writing experiences in school.

In spite of these comments and similar ones by Fulwiler (1980); (Elbow 1973) Shuman (1984) and Raleigh (1927) there would appear to be a need for caution. Improvement in writing which depended on nothing more than unsupervised practice would likely produce very poor results. Perhaps the key point here is that without practice, the effects of any instruction in writing would also be minimal. I submit that teachers act in the direction of too little practice, with predictable loss to writing development.

Writing Helps Learning Across the Curriculum

There is a growing body of literature on the concept of writing as a mode of learning. Some theorists think of writing as a unique mode of learning.

Baker (1971) says "Writing is a kind of moment-by-moment problem solving that exercises us along the very edge of thought itself. Thus writing forms and clarifies thought" (p. 14). Baker quotes Darwin who had said that writing "led me to see the errors in my reasoning and in my observations or those of others" (p. 14).

Richards (In Baker et al., 1971), points out the relative advantages of writing over speech as a way of developing the mind.

> We cannot easily in speech, in pre-literate speech especially, compare one way of saying something with another way of saying it. And yet nothing more marks the educated mind than this. We cannot, while speaking, linger to weigh doubts, to qualify, to differentiate, to

> revise ... without becoming unbearable. While writing, we can and we should. (p. 74)

Emig (1977) believes that writing is a powerful mode of learning "because writing as process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies" (p. 122).

Flower and Hayes (In Gregg and Steinberg, 1980), outline a cognitive process model of the writing process which they developed through a method called "protocol analysis". They too feel that writing can be a mode of learning.

The Bullock Report (1975) touched on the role of writing in learning. "In the practice of writing the child, left alone with his evolving utterance, is engaged in generating knowledge for himself" (p. 50). (Some would argue that he is also generating knowledge <u>about</u> himself.)

Shuman (1984) says "the fundamental rationale for encouraging writing in all classrooms is deceptively simple: students who write about topics understand them better" (p. 54). These topics could come from any content area.

Similarly, Raimes (1980) defined writing as "a process in which ideas are formed and reformed, inseparable from thinking; students who use their language abilities to explore ideas, synthesize, and communicate are actually learning the subject matter more fully" (p. 799).

Judy and Judy (1981) also have some interesting thoughts about writing and learning. They say "unless you can write it, you don't understand it" and "writing is inextricably bound up with the making of ideas" (p. 14).

Elbow (1973) tells writers that "meaning is not what you start out with, but what you end up with" (p. 15). He then reiterates this with an admonition to "think of writing not as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook a message" (p. 15).

Martin, Darcy, Newton and Parker (1976) showed how children can be encouraged to make sense of new information by writing about it, and using it to think with. This requires writing in all areas of the curriculum and it requires teachers who want to get involved with students in the development of writing strategies.

Spencer (1983) agrees with writing across the curriculum as a means of learning in all subject areas. He says "The basic point is the same for writing in English and in other subject: get the purpose clear and do the thinking needed to achieve it: that thinking is an important part of learning and desired qualities in writing will result from it" (p. 112).

At this point, the reader may be wondering whether most of the concerns about writing have not been addressed and possibly corrected in other areas. Recent publications assure that these problems have not all been

solved. Olson (1985) quotes Carnegie Foundation President Ernest Boyer, who says that "writing should be taught across the curriculum because clear writing leads to clear thinking; clear thinking is the basis of clear writing" (p. 102). Boyer thus reiterates the notion of a clear connection between writing and thinking, and at the same time states that writing is not yet being taught across the curriculum.

In discussing the reforms called for in A Nation at Risk (1983), Langer and Applebee (1985) suggest that "More effective teaching of writing can be an essential component of any successful reform" (p. 36). They go on to specify that to improve the quality of teaching of writing would be to improve the quality of thinking.

Smith (1982), in correcting what he calls a myth that "writing involves transferring thoughts from the mind to paper" (p. 793), notes how:

> Writing can create ideas and experiences on paper which could never have existence in the mind (and possibly not the "real world" either). Thoughts are created in the act of writing, which changes the writer just as it changes the paper on which the text is produced. Many authors have said that their books know more than they do; that they cannot recount in detail what their books contain before, while, or after they write them. Writing is not a matter of taking dictation from yourself; it is more like a conversation with a highly responsive and reflective other person. (p. 793)

It is possible to surmise from these comments that Smith is a believer in the use of writing as a mode of learning, and a unique mode at that.

> By separating the knower from the known (Havelock, 1963) writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before not only to the external objective world quite distinct from itself but also to the internal self against whom the objective world is set. (Ong, 1982, p. 105)

These writers and many others have strong beliefs in the usefulness of writing as a way of learning: Sadly, too many school teachers do not share such a belief, so that what was true for Leacock (1944) may well be true of many schools today. "It [writing] is still thought of as 'if it meant string words together, whereas in reality the main part of it is 'thinking'" (p. 3).

What the Experiences of One Teacher Say About Writing as Self-fulfillment

I sit in a 4 x 8 shoe box of a room in the Queen Elizabeth II Library, writing this thesis. Around me are the dozens of books and journal articles I have gathered over the last year, together with the blue cards and the green cards I have used to organize my notes. The room is a brick prison with only a table and a few shelves. I think back to my study room at home, which was also small, with a desk, chair and some shelves full of books. That room was no prison. It was happy with frequent visits from my loved ones to cheer me on in my writing and study.

The thoughts of my home are then shattered by the realization that all my writing done over the course of the winter has come to nothing. I have scrapped virtually

all of it. Here in my writing cell I attempt to salvage some ideas, some notes, but they are few and uninspiring.

Yet strangely out of this imprisonment has come something good. I feel I have begun to rehabilitate, to rejuvenate, but mainly to grow. Now I see that I was in too much haste to do my thesis. I was trying to leap over the process to get to a product, any product, so long as it would lead me to convocation, soon. I was being a hypocrite of the first order, because I was reluctant to do that which I advocate for my own high school students - revising and rewriting.

Now I remember why I started this program in the first place - it was pride in my ability that led me to apply. I felt that I had something to prove to myself. I am a believer in the tenet that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing well.

I know that this ordeal of writing a thesis will strengthen my knowledge base in writing, and will make me a better teacher and department head. Perhaps I am moving closer to the attainment of self-actualization which Maslow (1966) posited as the highest of human needs. When this thesis is finally accepted, I will be a very proud man, but more than that, I will be a better man for having pushed myself out to new horizons, and as Baker (1971) said, for having "found myself there" in my writing. What more could a would-be scholar ask?

There is a crying need to arouse in high school students the desire to write freely and honestly so that they too can share the "first benefit of writing", as Allen (1982) puts it. This writer has seen dozens of students realize that pleasure over the years, especially since he introduced journal writing to the students.

There are adolescents out there who write for pleasure, who write for self-discovery, who write for the pure joy of finding themselves in writing, who write to expiate feelings of guilt, who write to express otherwise hidden desires or fears and for a host of other reasons. It is a lucky teacher indeed who is permitted (trusted) to read some of these writings, for this open writing is not shared with many. I have been fortunate to be so trusted and will share some of these experiences with the reader. Throughout, my contention will remain that writing should be taught more sensibly and sensitively!

Writing As Therapy

Note: In this section names of students will be changed and slight details altered to respect the privacy of all students referred to.

Sara

Sara was sixteen years old when she arrived in my Language 1101 class. Her mother had left her husband on the east coast, and was now living common-law with a local

man. Sara still loved her father, and still wrote him. She was embarrassed about her mother's behaviour and they constantly argued. She was clearly an obstacle to her mother's happiness. Meanwhile, her father was an alcoholic and either could not or would not get custody. Sara was extremely upset and very withdrawn in class.

How then did I find out all this information? The medium of communication was a journal Sara kept as part of her English course. The first entry required some background information, thus the source of the revelation about the move to Port Aux Basques.

The rest of this information was only slowly revealed as I reacted to her writings by writing back. There came a point at which I grew alarmed. One particular entry showed Sara to be very depressed, and hinting of taking some drastic action. This time I wrote back to her suggesting that she talk to me after school.

Her next day's journal entry was very surprising. Sara said that there was no need to talk, because simply writing down her problems to a trusted friend made the problems more bearable. She also said that she realized some of her daughter-mother conflicts were her fault. After that, Sara's writing showed less pessimism, and she is now a well-adjusted high school graduate.

Other students from time to time would use their journal writings as therapy. Their one concern was that the journal would not be seen by anyone but the teacher.

The problems thus dealt with run the gamut from boy-girl conflicts to subject learning problems. Many of these the teacher could not even attempt to solve; many more may have been solved simply by "talking" to someone about them, through writing - writing that existed because one teacher encouraged journal writing.

Paula

A teacher can expect almost anything from students at times, and one thing an English teacher can expect is unsolicited writing - especially poetry. Invariably, there will be one or two students per year who dabble in poetry, and will ask the opinion of one or more teachers about the relative merits of a poem or two.

Paula was such a student - she was a talented seventeen year old who seemed to have the world on a string - she had influential parents, money, intelligence, good looks - everything to make an adolescent girl happy. She was a songwriter, musician and a budding poet.

Her poetry appeared to be quite good, full of impressive vocabulary, and lively imagery, expressing a contented view of life. I enjoyed each and every one of them, and almost failed to notice the gradual shift in subject matter and imagery until the poems were all concerned with death, dying and implicit wishes for death.

I was not sure how to contend with this new poetry, but tried talking with Paula. The talk revealed that Paula had submitted some of what she felt to be her better

poems to a well known Newfoundland poet, and he had just devastated her hopes with a savage pen. Paula very soon stopped writing poetry and has not written since. There were no suicidal thoughts at all, contrary to what I had feared. Her dark poetry had worked as a sort of therapy to help her deal with feelings of rejection.

For other adolescents, writing as therapy has been manifested in diaries, stories, and letters that never got mailed, but thrown into a wastebasket. It is a rare, but worthwhile application of writing, and more students need to be introduced to its value. Teachers can make that introduction.

Writing As An Escape From Reality

Newspaper and magazine advice columns abound with letters written by troubled (but mostly curious) teenagers. Pen pal clubs have high memberships. Fan clubs for stars are deluged with letters from adolescents.

All these have one common factor: the ability of one's writing to take one far away from the ordinary, mundane daily life, into a world of fantasy so common to, and so necessary to adolescents. People whose arm must be twisted to write a history paper, scramble to write letters to pen pals as soon as a letter is received. (This is often done in class while the teacher lectures!).

Other students fill their textbook covers with witty sayings, or love poetry. Still others write suicide notes on their "last will and testament".

I have encountered one girl who wrote "true confessions" type stories in which the main character was clearly a girl like herself.

Tanya

Tanya comes from a really poor family. She did not have a whole lot of different clothes, and what she did have was too mature for a young girl. She was fifteen going on twenty-five in her actions. She appeared to have delusions of grandeur. At least five times during the year she asked me to read "stories" she had written. They were all soapy and shallow, but all had similar themes: a poor young girl overcomes her background, marries a rich, handsome guy and lives happily ever after, vengefully refusing to help her domineering mother. Only minor details of names, locations and manner of meeting were ever changed from one story to the next.

Tanya's writing was clearly an outlet for her frustrations and an escape from the reality of her life situation. There is not a thing wrong with that use of writing and it is something to be encouraged, and built upon. Who knows, Tanya may even learn to write original stories and work as a professional writer.

Writing Gives Power Over Language

Perhaps few things encountered in a teaching situation are so difficult to deal with as the student who says "I don't know what to write about" or "I know what I want to say, but I can't get it down on paper". The tendency of a teacher is to treat either of these comments as an excuse to avoid work.

A frequently used technique would be to ask the student to make an outline to get his or her thoughts straight, but that will normally lead to the same sort of confusion. What that sort of student may need is the opportunity to freewrite, to get a chance to have the "feel" of getting words down on paper. S/he may write about whatever s/he feels like writing at the moment, perhaps even repeatedly writing down a sentence such as "I don't know what to say", until a thought strikes him and he writes that down.

Richard

Richard was a student in Basic English 1102, a course meant for the bottom twenty five perceht of students in Level I. Placement in the class is based on achievement in Language at the Junior High School. Richard was shy, withdrawn and hesitant in speech. He would never ask questions and barely mumbled a brief "I don't know" in response to any question from the teacher. His handwriting and spelling were very poor, and his use of sentences was limited. No matter what the nature of any

writing exercise, Richard's lengthiest response was limited to about three lines. He usually started later, and finished much earlier than other students.

As the year progressed, and as requirements for writing became more demanding, Richard's production fell to a standstill. Time for writing for him became the time to have to go to the bathroom. I began to wonder whether this might not have to be the first student ever to be demoted to grade nine, but then curiosity as well as concern led me to try to see what made Richard tick.

I began by asking Richard to introduce himself, his likes, dislikes and background, his hobbies, fears and hopes. I got the first four-line autobiography I had ever seen, but decided to use that to get Richard writing.

Richard was invited to try freewriting, at first with suggested topics by the teacher, but later on anything he wanted. I read and reacted to each piece of writing in a positive way, especially praising any increase in length of presentation. The growth in amount of writing was very slow, but the handwriting somehow improved dramatically, as did the neatness of the papers. Before too long, Richard announced to the teacher, "Sir, I wrote a story for you last night". The story was a personal experience narrative about a fishing trip he had taken. "I said, "I thought you couldn't write, Richard", "Boy, this is good stuff".

At least twice a week from that day on, Richard arrived with an unsolicited piece of writing for me to check. He still did not speak up in class, but his level of new confidence in language was very apparent. (The next year of school, by the way, Richard's essay was judged third best in a regional Education Week essay contest).

Since the experience with Richard about five years ago, I have begun each new year with having each student introduce himself in written form as standard procedure. The personal information gained is practical, but the samples of writing and inherent attitudes towards it are even more so. They allow me to see which pupils already have some power over language, which frequent writing both manifests and instills.

Writing Helps Preserve Culture

This province has had a long oral tradition of folklore. Wisdom about medicine, skills of ship building, stories of brave deeds -- in short, all of our cultural heritage has been part of the oral tradition passed on from old to young.

That culture is quickly being lost due to modern communications and forms of entertainment which may make the fireside chat with grandpa seem dull by comparison.

It is incumbent upon teachers to help preserve the

pride of culture in students, and this presents a unique opportunity to learn to use writing.

Students in Language 2101 are taught to do various kinds of research, including the interview. All students are required to do a course in Culture 1200. I combined elements of these two courses and had students do interviews with senior citizens about by-gone days, trying to collect a sort of composite picture of life in a typical community. The interviews could be taped, but they had to be transcribed for the classroom collection.

The efforts at transcription were useful in promoting awareness of dialect, as well as awareness of standard English, but more importantly, they promoted an awareness of the importance of writing to the preservation of culture.

The response to such writing demands was overwhelming. Students of all levels of ability found out that they too could write something important. It would have taken little effort to get some of these pupils further involved in writing about their culture by helping them write poems, stories or plays based on some of the experiences. Likewise, it would be possible to use the interviews as interdisciplinary studies, by working at mathematical, political and social aspects of their grandparents' days.

The possibilities are nearly limitless, and the short and long term benefits of such writing cannot be measured

in terms of dollars and cents. Writing can be relevant to everyday life, and should be taught for that reason too.

Writing Increases Post-secondary Opportunities

I had a somewhat humbling experience several years ago when confronted by the owner of a local hardware store, who at one time had been a teacher. His complaint was that most of the applicants for a job at his store did not have the ability to write a proper letter of application, in spite of having graduated from high school. He said that while the form and spelling were bad, the real source of concern for him was the lack of clarity in the letters. He was not quite sure whether some of them wanted to get a job or wanted to order something from his store.

The relevant question for English teachers, and for all educators is this: How many more employers are there who get equally deficient job applications? How many of our graduates fail to land jobs because of a lack of writing skills? Then, when people are hired, how frustrating must it be for companies to either cover up blunders or have to set up programs to give employees basic writing skills training?

Teachers must be more accountable for their products. They must teach writing of all sorts, or else they have to accept some responsibility for failure to do so.

During the encounter with the aforementioned businessman, in attempting to rationalize my apparent failure, I told the businessman that all the really good graduates go off to college or university, while the less able try to seek employment.

The facts did not bear out that explanation. Too many high school graduates either fail to cope with post secondary studies or find the transition very difficult. Both students and professors would agree that one of the prime causes of poor performance at university is the inability to write coherent essays or assignments, much less conduct effective research based writing.

Other high school graduates, who enter one of the technical colleges, the Marine Institute, or the community colleges, encounter similar difficulties with writing, as their instructors willingly attest.

The essence of the matter is that adolescent students in high schools learn neither scholarly, nor technical nor business writing, yet there are courses in each type of writing in the high school system.

There is a crying need for a new look at writing in the high school, and a new emphasis on the teaching of writing.

Writing Improves Writing Ability

There are quite a few people who would agree with the idea that writing improves writing. This makes sense if you follow the dictum "practice makes perfect".

I have never run an experiment to prove or disprove such a contention.

One thing is certain. Whether writers improve their writing by writing or not, it seems clear that they will not improve their writing by not writing.

Perhaps one ought to conclude that writing with thoughtful and caring coaching (by a teacher) will improve writing.

Writing Helps Learning Across The Curriculum

Thoughtfully prepared writing assignments can make a real difference in student attributes and student learning of content areas.

For the last three years I have had the experience of teaching the course Health 1100, in addition to a full load of English courses. During the first two years I taught by the book and with the usual attempts to get at the "facts" of health education. The questions I set for students were all based directly on factual information available from either the text or the notes. The pass rate each year was quite high, even though the class group consisted of lower ability students.

The course was not particularly enjoyable for me, and likely very dull for the students. They probably learned very little, except for whatever was required to get them through the final exams.

This past year, the course was different in many ways. I was given two small groups of Health 1100, and it was a toss-up which one had the least concerned, least motivated, least capable students. They had probably been in too many courses such as this one already.

The big difference was that since beginning research on writing, I had gained some understanding of the possible role of writing in the content areas. "Why not teach health using writing?", I asked myself.

Years of frustration said that these students would not adapt to writing, but since hope springs eternal in the human breast, I began the course.

First, there were the usual "hellos" and promises for the course. Then each student was asked to tell me about himself in written form. Having a teacher with two heads would have caused no more of a shock. "But this ain't English, it's Health, sir!"

I could see this was going to be easy.

Time went on and they gradually became used to other weird writings: a letter to Bishop Martin Mate in response to his editorial in the Newfoundland Churchman on the question of A.I.D.S.; a letter to the minister of health about teenage drinking; an interview with a

potential suicide victim; an editorial on water pollution; a story about a teenaged drug addict; a character profile of an anorexic; an advertisement against smoking; a speech to children on the dangers of drugs; a play involving some aspect of family conflicts and a comparative study of teen pregnancy years ago and now.

In all these, emphasis was placed on content, and help was given in revising. The students were so busy writing that no time was found to view the films that had been a "must" part of the course in other years.

What then of the course material "coverage"? The students covered all relevant chapters and all major topics. More than that, they learned some real things about health related matters. They enjoyed the course, and they learned to see writing with a new respect. They were not bored with Health 1100.

Could writing of that type be done in other courses? Definitely, yes. I also applied many such writing principles to Literature 3201.

Can writing promote learning? There are at least twenty-five students of Health 1100 who will tell you "yes, it can".

We need more teachers involved in more efforts to use writing to aid learning.

CHAPTER III

WHY WRITING IS NOT BEING TAUGHT MORE EFFECTIVELY

> Iron rusts from disuse, stagnant water loses its purity and in cold weather becomes frozen: even so does inaction sap the vigor of the mind.
>
> Leonardo da Vinci

"The person who writes stands up to be shot" says Barzun (In Whitemann, 1981).

Thank heavens that is not literally true, but given the apprehensions about writing and the difficulty many people have with writing, one might think that there must be some firing squad set up to execute would-be writers.

Why is it, then, that high school students do not write more, and why is it that high school teachers do not teach writing more effectively? The reasons are many. Some of them lie within the hearts and minds of students, while others have more foundation in the actions of teachers (or lack thereof).

One factor that is common to students and teachers alike is the perception that writing has little relevance in this modern world. But as Barrow (1982) assures us, "ours is still a written culture" (p. 37). Furthermore, writing has been shown to be important for learning and for a great many other benefits to students. If anything, writing is more relevant now than it has ever been.

It would be instructive then, to consider why many students do not like to write, and why teachers do not do a good job with teaching writing.

The Student's View of Writing

For the typical student, writing is very difficult, but in that sense, students are not unique. Raleigh (1927) said "to write perfect prose is neither more or less difficult than to lead a perfect life" (p. 13). Students should be told that writing is difficult but worthwhile work. Many worthwhile learning activities are difficult, but that should be a challenge to students. Smith (1981), speaking on the difficulty of writing, points out that children will do hard work if they believe it is worthwhile, and he reminds us that "only work which seems to have no point or productive outcomes is aversive" (p. 795).

Part of the difficulty in writing comes from a fear of the risks of writing. When you speak, there is always the defense that you did not actually "say" what someone thought you did; but when you write you put yourself on display, and what you said is more difficult to deny - it is there in black and white!

Sartre (1965) says "no prose-writer is quite capable of expressing what he wants to say; he says too much or not enough; each phrase is a wager, a risk assumed; the

more cautious he is, the more attention the work attracts" (p. 31).

Bereiter and Scardamalia (In Freedman, Pringle and Yalden, 1983) say that "writing a long essay is probably the most complex constructive act that most human beings are ever expected to perform" (p. 20). They point out that other more complex acts are assigned only to specialists, while essays are assigned to every child in school.

Students need to be helped to overcome the difficulties of writing, but they sometimes do not get help.

As a result of the risks and the difficulties of writing, students find writing to be a very great source of anxiety. "By its very nature, writing is an anxiety-producing activity. Writing is reexamining values, and nothing produces more anxiety for the human being than reexamining widely accepted values and searching for a way of justifying and articulating the reexamination" (Atchity, 1986, p. 3).

Glatthorn (1981) states that some of this anxiety is caused by "cognitive overload", since the composing process is complex, in that it involves memory, cognition, language and psychomotor behaviour. "This would be especially true of younger or unskilled writers" (p. 1).

Students need encouragement and praise for their efforts if they are to overcome their anxiety.

One result of the daring to put one's ideas on paper is a sense of vulnerability. You leave yourself open to attack, in a sense, to anyone who may choose to read your ideas. People do not, by nature, like to be vulnerable. This is true even of professional writers such as Atchity (1986). "Expression makes the writer vulnerable, removing the defenses that protect the inner self from the world's attack, misunderstanding, jealousy, and indifference. This inevitable vulnerability is another source of the writer's anxiety" (p. 19).

Bushman (1984), in introducing his book, admits that even with all his prior success "the thought of sharing this in print makes me very vulnerable" (p. vii).

I feel exactly the same way. It is difficult to keep on writing, knowing that eventually everything you have written will be scrutinized by three readers who will collectively determine your future, with no information other than what you have painstakingly put to paper. No more do you feel that a thesis is just a big term paper with a hard cover on it.

A teacher who has undergone this sort of trial is likely to be more considerate of his or her own students and of their attempts to write. S/he has been in the student's place, with the fear of difficult writing, with the risk and anxiety that accompany the writing task. But if an experienced teacher, who has progressed well in

education, finds writing this much of a fearsome thing, then how much more so must it be for young adolescents?

Once the writer has overcome the initial fears, the false starts, and begins to put words to paper, s/he has an additional problem. S/he knows that his first attempt, his first draft, if you will, is not perfect. S/he knows that s/he needs to spend time at reviewing the piece. Then comes the fear of not having enough material. One of the commonest questions posed by young writers in school is, "how long does it have to be"? This fear may have grown out of previous teaching practices which specified a certain number of words as being the optimum length. This concern with length of presentation runs on up through the ranks of university students and even into graduate school, where it seems that a lengthy thesis is often considered better by virtue of its length, not of its quality.

Samuel Butler, (In Macrorie (1968), said "A young writer is tempted to leave everything, for fear he will have nothing to say if he goes cutting out too freely. But it is easier to be long than to be short" (p. 31).

An experienced teacher of writing knows that this fear is one of the most difficult ones to overcome in students. It is this fear of not having enough words, and not laziness, that keeps many students from revising. Thus after the initial fear of not having anything to say on a topic has been overcome, the next biggest fear is

that of not having enough to say. Both are hindrances to student writing.

One problem with school writing that has been generally overlooked is the practice of arbitrarily assigning topics to students. This practice makes no allowance for individual differences, for male-female preferences, or for what is on the minds of the students at the particular time. What it leads to is a sense of carelessness about the writing process itself and a missing sense of ownership about the end product.

Graves (1983) suggests that teachers give students freedom to choose writing topics, but that freedom must be gradually introduced, preferably in lower grades. Otherwise, you would have students who get totally frustrated by their inability even to choose a topic.

There are many times, however, when students will not have a free choice, such as when content area teachers assign content specific essays, but that matter will be discussed later here.

Thus far I have examined student related reasons for poor writing or a lack of writing. These include: difficulty of the writing act, a sense of risk, anxiety, vulnerability, fears about length of presentation, and the question of ownership of writing which is related to choice of topic. Any one of these can cause problems for the student writer and, unfortunately, very many students are bothered by all of these factors.

A Teacher's View of Writing

The question of why teachers do not teach writing, or why many teachers who claim to teach writing do not do a better job, is both timely and provocative.

It is timely in the sense that in other parts of the world writing is getting quite a bit of attention from government officials, parents, educators, researchers and classroom teachers. It is timely in this province because there have been tentative moves towards improving writing, with new language arts programs in elementary, high school, and, now recently, in junior high school, which purport to teach "the writing process".

It is provocative because there is still widespread disagreement over who should teach writing, at what levels and in what manner. On the one hand you have the traditionalists who think of writing and grammar as being almost the same, and thus the responsibility of the English teacher alone. On the other hand are the progressivists who see writing as a school-wide responsibility.

Closer examination of the possible reason for the state of writing may reveal some ways of going about correcting the situation, for that will be my aim.

The growth of the modern high school has led to some very significant benefits to teachers and students. One such benefit is subject area specialization. Teachers who are trained in one or two content areas and teach only in

those areas seem able to offer better content teaching to their students. Content teachers have come to feel that writing is the province of the English teacher alone, as Britton (1975) noted in a study of England's schools:

> Many teachers, we suggest, entertain the belief that an English teacher has only to teach pupils "to write" and the skill they learn will be effective in any lesson and any kind of writing task. As a result, it seems to us, a learning process properly, the responsibility of teachers of all subjects, is left to the English teacher alone, and the inevitable failures are blamed on him. (p. 3)

Experience shows that transfer of writing skills does not generally take place. Part of the reason for this may be that many content area teachers do not require writing, but it is also worth nothing that this transfer of writing ability does not even take place within English classes, or indeed from year to year in English. Thus we have the familiar phenomenon of English teachers blaming teachers in lower grades for poor skills, but the fact is that skills were taught - but were forgotten. Writing is no different from any other skill in the sense that it is lost if not used and used often (Carr, in Shuman, 1977).

Too often, the writing that is done in content areas is done only as a part of testing, and that usually means short answer or "objective" tests. Critics of this sort of writing include Judy and Judy (1981), Britton (1975), and Spencer (1983), who reported that in Scotland:

> Half of what is written is schools is copied or dictated and about a quarter consists of short answers (single sentences, or fill-in-the-blanks). The remaining quarter is continuous writing in the pupils' own words, but more than half of it is short - a few lines only per task. (p. 12)

Studies in Canada (Fillion, 1979) and the United States (Applebee, 1981, Langer and Applebee, 1985) reveal that similar uses of writing prevail in North Amerida.

A further aspect of the writing problems related to the content areas is the overdependence on rote learning (Wheeler, 1979). Students memorize brief notes and then parrot the same notes, almost verbatim, back on any test. Students of course find this type of learning safe and manageable, but they really learn little about writing from it. They do not retain much about the content for very long, either.

Graves (1978) tells us that another reason for avoiding the teaching of writing is the difficulty of quantifying improvement in writing. Both teachers and parents like to have student results in nice manageable figures, as they do on standardized tests. It is very difficult, as Graves tells us, to be able to say that Johnny's writing ability has improved over a six months period. Writing does not lend itself to that sort of qualification. Progress is often slow and almost imperceptible.

There are a number of other reasons for the problem with writing, all of which may be subsumed under the

heading "the lack of sufficient access to recent research on writing and theory of writing".

Krashen (1984) suggests two reasons why research and theory have not had more impact upon teachers and teaching. "First, previous attempts to apply research and theory to teaching writing have not been successful" (p. 1). Krashen cites as an example the attempt by some teachers to apply the wrong research or inappropriate theories - such as the theory of transformational grammar - to writing. His second reason is "that the relevant research has not been presented to teachers in a coherent way, that is, in the form of a theory" (p. 2).

Krashen says that the reasons for this situation are that the research is relatively new, and that it has been presented only piecemeal through journals.

A further reason, which Krashen did not consider, is that classroom teachers may well have an aversion to theory. They want to get to "the practical stuff" so that they can use it in the classroom. Thus they turn away from any attempts at the development of a theory.

Whatever their reasons for not being acquainted with theories, the results of that fact are quite clear. One of the most overlooked facts about a writing classroom is that everyone in the class should write, especially the teacher. S/he is a role model and must be seen to write, and rewrite. S/he must share his writings with his or her students. From the teacher students learn that writing is

fun and challenging, yet also difficult and tentative. S/he can also show students the need and value of revision to the writing process. Too many teachers either stroll around or check some other work at the desk, unaware of the role model they are presenting.

Smith (1981) says that "a teacher who is only seen writing comments on children's work, reports for parents, or notes and exercises for classroom activities will demonstrate that writing is simply for administrative and classroom purposes" (p. 797). Most recent theorists share his view.

It would seem to be almost impossible that there are still teachers who have not heard of research proving that the teaching of grammar has little or no effect upon writing ability. Yet they still live and teach in some of our schools, and some of them are quite young. The research proving that teaching grammar does not help writing is not young, however.

One of the most refreshing condemnations of the role of grammar in the act of writing came from Flesch (1949). He showed that the grammar of Aristotle, on which English grammar was based, makes no sense in modern times.

Part of the reason for teachers sticking to their outdated notions about grammar is public pressure, especially that which followed in the wake of A Nation at Risk (1983), to get back to the basics. Stock (1986) refers to such beliefs as "pedagogies based on the tacit

assumption that proper forms of language have to be in place before something meaningful can be said" (p. 101).

Graves (1978) uses a football metaphor to describe such an approach to writing:

> The so-called return of the basics vaults over writing to the skills of penmanship, vocabulary, spelling, and usage that are thought necessary to precede composition. So much time is devoted to blocking and tackling that there is often no time to play the real game: writing. (p. 10)

Thus, there are teachers who mean well, but their understanding of how grammar fits in with writing is outmoded. They steal from their students time that could be more productively used in writing. Some grammar must be taught, but only as the need for it arises in the context of writing.

The teachers who have been exposed to some of the recent research as well as those who teach the "new" English courses in the high schools are possibly a bit confused about some of the terminology. One hears about the writing process, the stage model, the cognitive process model, linearity, recursion, freewriting, conferencing, expressive, transactional, and poetic, prewrite, write, rewrite, conception, incubation, production, preparation, incubation articulation, editing, planning, translation, reviewing, cognitive motor, language across the curriculum, whole language, writing across the curriculum and who knows how many more?

Whoever takes time to help teachers understand that all the names apply to some very basic ideas about

writing, and that even if you know none of the names, you can write and also teach writing? Apparently, no one does, so English teachers go on with their own ideas about how to teach writing. They assign a topic. They tell students that a good writer always begins with an outline, and that this outline must be passed in. (I remember my high school English writing and how I used to make up an outline after the essay was written!) Macrorie (1968) reports that "eight out of ten writers say they never use outlines, and the other two say they use them only in later stages of writing, in the second or third draft when they have all the materials captured, and need only to arrange them strategically" (p. 112).

Seldom in descriptions of the writing process will you find requirement for, or even reference to, the need for an outline. In many instances, the construction of an outline is one of a number of artificial constraints which postpone the real task of writing. Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) say:

> Multiplying the number of constraints to include the making of an outline, the recollection of some sort of prewriting heuristics, the declaring of a thesis statement, the making of topic sentences, the writing of a "conclusion paragraph", and so forth, testing them all in turn, will enhance the illusion that improvement is occurring; thereby making this style of curriculum irresistible to teachers and administrators under public pressure to deliver "results". (p. 154)

Experience has shown that the outline is one of the least liked aspects of writing. If there is a place for an

outline it is after much writing has already been done. An outline helps find a sense of order in the piece of writing.

Once the outline is done, the English teacher may take a quick look at it, but generally s/he goes about some business while the students write. At the end of the period, or the next day if the writing was part of homework, the teacher takes the papers in. S/he reads each one, with red pen in hand, carefully marking mistakes, then assigns either a letter grade or a numerical grade, writes a comment or two on the errors, and passes back the essays to the students.

The comments tend to relate to errors, and the red indicating these errors gives an untidy, if not absolutely gory aspect to the paper. Raleigh (1927) identified very clearly the problem with this approach to writing:

> When you go the teacher of composition, they cannot tell you what to say; they wait until you have said something unaided, and they carp at it. They seem to have nothing to say themselves; they live by battening on those who have. Their pupil, when he has learned all they can teach, is a prig with nothing to say. (p. 14.

Despite all our apparent improvements since Sir Walter Raleigh's time, we must wonder whether the teaching of writing has changed all that much. I think not. There is still very little teaching of writing as a process. Writing is still not being done often enough in English classrooms and especially so in content areas. English teachers too often "wait til the student has said

something and then carp at it", and we still choke the writing out of our students. Our evaluation system continues to neglect the message of the student, and dwells instead on its surface structure.

For some English teachers, and for very many content teachers, the evaluation of writing is reason enough to avoid writing almost completely.

Four aspects of evaluation cause particular difficulties to teachers: a perception of increased teacher workload; a lack of knowledge about the criteria for good writing, the subjectivity of evaluating writing, and the accountability of teacher to students for the guides assigned to writing. All of these factors are interrelated and need amplification here.

The perception of increased teacher work load is based partly on fact, partly on myth. It is true that the evaluation of writing takes more time than the evaluation of short answer questions. It is not true that every single piece of multiparagraph writing has to be evaluated in great depth. There are alternatives. Some of the pressure of evaluating can be lessened by the use of such techniques as peer editing (Baker, 1981); self-evaluation (Beaven in Cooper and Odell, 1977; Hall, 1981); individualized goal setting (Beaven in Cooper and Odell, 1977); primary trait scoring (Lloyd-Jones in Cooper and Odell, 1977) and holistic evaluation (Cooper, 1977; Diederich, 1974).

In addition, teachers must realize that not every piece of writing a student does has to be evaluated. It would be perfectly acceptable to have the student pass in at intervals the piece of writing that s/he chooses to have evaluated out of all the writing done during that interval.

Still another aspect of evaluation that interferes with writing is the lack of consensus among teachers about what makes good writing, and what criteria can be used to measure quality of writing. Diederich (1974), for one, pointed out the inconsistency among teachers in marking essays. Teachers are aware of this inconsistency, and thus they may avoid situations that require evaluation of student writings. They may use some entirely arbitrary and subjective method of marking based on their own perceptions of errors.

Other teachers avoid writing because they do not like to be held accountable for their marking decisions. I know from experience on provincial marking boards that teachers quite often engage in what is called "safe marking", which means assigning a median mark when in doubt. It seems that only really high marks or really low marks attract the attention of fellow markers or the chief marker. Thus the "safe" marker is never questioned on his or her rating.

A similar fear of accountability occurs in schools. A teacher has to account to his students for any grade

assigned a particular piece of writing. It is therefore tempting to rate your "good" students high, because they are the ones who will likely question the mark assigned, and to rate your "poor" students low, because they will hardly ever object to their marks. Therein you have the effect of bias, as identified by Wheeler (1979). Such bias is not only unfair, but further contributes to the "writing block" among weaker students, as identified by Wheeler.

As a defense against possible questions from students, the teacher uses a powerful weapon - red ink. Red ink, used especially throughout a piece of writing to indicate errors, will quiet the restive student, and red, negative comments at the end will annihilate even the most rebellious.

While the use of such a marking scheme might tend to ease the conscience of the teacher, it does little for the ego of the student. Diederich (1974) has shown that negative comments destroy the enthusiasm for writing, creating an even greater problem for the student. As Macrorie (1968) said: "Teachers, have been saying, "Wrong! wrong! wrong!" when they should have been saying, "Right! good! keep going!" even if they said about only one word or one sentence in a paper" (p. vi).

Many others would agree with Macrorie, as I would. Praise works minor wonders for self-esteem in writers, and self-esteem is part of the fuel that fires a writer to

keep on writing. Research by Gee (1972) showed that, "student writers who received only positive comments on their papers wrote more than students who received only negative comments or no comments at all "and that the students also enjoyed writing more" (p. 219).

It would seem pedagogically wise to conduct the business of evaluating writing in a way that would increase production and heighten enjoyment, yet we often do just the opposite, and then wonder why our students hate to write.

The foregoing discussion has shown that it is difficult to isolate a single cause for the deficiency in writing and for the deficiency in teaching writing. There are a number of factors, some unique to students, others unique to teachers, some common to both teacher and students, which affect the problem. It is therefore unwise to begin to point accusing fingers at one group or the other. It is much more sensible to look at ways that we can begin to change the situation, and give writing its deserved place in schools.

CHAPTER IV

HOW CAN WE GIVE WRITING MORE PROMINENCE IN HIGH SCHOOLS

> You learn to write quickly by learning to write well, not the other way around.
>
> Quintilian

Substantial and lasting changes come slowly in education. Fads, by-words, and slogans change vogue in education as frequently as they do in secular life. Consequently, teachers have become suspicious of what may seem to them to be temporal changes, and are normally reluctant to surrender traditional methods and practices in favour of what may be mere novelties. Part of this tendency is based on experience of having new texts, new courses, and new approaches "dumped into their laps" without consultation or adequate preparation. The new language arts programs may fail for the same reasons.

Real progress in writing will not be made overnight, nor even in one year. Just as there is no single cause of the writing problem, so is there no single solution. Anyone expecting to improve writing by merely telling students and teachers to use "the writing process approach", without further discussion, may be sadly mistaken. Where then do we begin to solve the problems with writing in high schools?

I will attempt, with the help of relevant literature, to address that question next.

It has already been suggested that new ideas are too frequently dropped on teachers, but, as Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) point out:

> The teaching of writing will improve only when the motive to change inappropriate practices becomes stronger than the desire to cling to comfortable old habits. (p. 6)

What needs to be done first then, is the setting up of a program to train teachers in writing. Baker (1971) suggests "perhaps we should begin by teaching our teachers to write well, and to keep on writing, so that they can pass on something of their own syntactical and conceptual discoveries to their students" (p. 15).

That is a good suggestion, but the question then arises of how and where teachers should be trained. A usual training vehicle for teachers already in the field is the local writing workshop, run by successful, trained, teacher-writers. For teachers in training, it appears necessary for Memorial University to set up a writing program, and have the program part of the course requirements of all graduating teachers.

English teachers in various schools may have the ability to train content area teachers in writing, and if they do not, then the attempt to teach writing may help them. Richards (In Baker, Barzun and Richards, 1971), says, "One of the main advantages teachers have is that

when you try to teach something, you may learn something about it" (p. 43).

An interesting development in the United States has been large scale writing projects, the first of which (The Bay Area Writing Project) began in California in 1974.

> The founders of the Bay Area Writing Project believed that teachers who were given the opportunity to write, to share their work with colleagues, to study recent composition theory and research, to reexamine their own classroom practice, and to develop their own plan for improved instruction would become more effective writing teachers. This simple and sensible notion turned out to be entirely correct. (Daniels and Zemelman, 1985, p. 3).

A series of writing projects for various geographical sections of the province might prove useful. One difference from the American model might be that we could include all subject teachers, rather than just English teachers, so that we might better promote writing across the curriculum.

However it is accomplished, teachers must be led into accepting and promoting the need for an expanded use of writing. With the support of classroom teachers, all the other changes needed to improve writing can be implemented. Some of these changes may require very little extra effort from teachers, while others may necessitate a diversion of efforts. I will consider some of them here.

The first suggestion for teachers may be somewhat surprising, but it should not be so. I have long been aware that the better writers in school are also often

frequent readers. One way that we can improve writing then is to read more ourselves, and to encourage more reading among our students.

Krashen (1978) said that "a variety of studies indicate that voluntary pleasure reading contributes to the development of writing ability" (p. 4). Applebee (1978) studied 481 good high school writers and found them to be regular readers. McNeil (In Fader, 1976) evaluated results of a pleasure reading programs and found that readers showed greater writing fluency and wrote with greater complexity than did control subjects. Baker, (In Baker, Barzun and Richards, 1971) crystalized the reading-writing connection in these words: "Reading will stimulate and expand our ideas; writing will bring them to realization, and, with them, our capacity to realize" (p. 15).

How can teachers encourage reading among high school students? Legge (1984) reported very satisfactory results of a year long SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) program in one Newfoundland high school. In such a program, teachers then have an opportunity to be seen as model readers.

The second suggestion is equally simple, though often forgotten. Teachers must provide opportunities for students to write more often. It is believed by many that just to write more frequently will tend to improve student writing. It is equally important to allow students to write for a wide variety of reasons, on a wide variety of

topics and subjects (Woodward and Philips, 1967; Squire and Applebee, 1969; and Fagan, 1980).

The notion of writing across the curriculum (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod and Rosen, 1975) should be pursued in this regard. All teachers need to become aware of the potential of writing in all school subjects. Each content area can use writing to further the course of learning and thereby, as Kantor (1981) suggests, "reinforce the value of writing as it becomes diffused through the school" (p. 66).

There are other things for teachers to remember early in the process of writing and even before beginning the process. They must remember to teach children that "writing is a complicated process, a variable series of steps or stages which moves, with conscious and unconscious recursions, from conception to planning to drafting to revision" (Daniels and Zemelman, p. 13).

Teachers must be prepared to lead students through the process of writing, giving attention to its three phases: (a) Preliminary activities, including brainstorming for possible topics (Elbow, 1981), free writing to get ideas on the topic (Elbow, 1973), or prewriting "to explain the matter to ourselves" (Britton, 1975, p. 2). (b) Writing (which combines at the same time prewriting and provision) thus the origin or the term "recursion" (Lindemann, 1982, p. 27). And, (c) Rewriting, during which time writers read what was written to see how

well it was said and how well it communicates what was meant (Murray, 1978). Any attempt to circumvent these necessary steps in the writing process will likely lead to frustrated students who stare wildly at blank pages.

Teachers should legitimize the idea of writing on personal experience. Allen (1982) showed that personal experience writing can be a springboard to better all around writing ability, even in students whose command of English is not that strong.

Journal writing is an excellent way to integrate student experiences into writing. Fulwiler (1980) advocates journal writing in all areas of the curriculum. "Journal writing works because every time students write, they individualize instruction; the act of silent writing, even for five minutes, generates ideas, observations, emotions. Regular writing makes it harder for students to remain passive" (p. 188).

Teachers, too, should keep a journal and be seen writing in it as often as possible.

Journal materials may be left entirely up to a student's mood at times, but teachers could frequently have the students write during a class to clear up a point or to frame a question about something that is not understood (Fulwiler, 1980).

Teachers need to make sure they have a clear understanding of what makes good writing, so that they can discuss with students the nature of good writing. I will

attempt to build a composite view of a good piece of writing, but for our immediate concern we could consider the words of Macrorie (1968):

> This is the first requirement for good writing: truth; not the truth (who ever knows surely what that is), but some kind of truth - a connection between the things written about, the words used in the writing, and the author's real experience in the world he knows well - whether in fact or dream or imagination. (p. 5)

All of these factors: increased reading, increased writing, writing across the curriculum, and the concept of writing as process, journal writing, and discussion of what makes good writing, are things that could lead to a better understanding of writing. All of them are responsibilities of classroom teachers. But responsibilities of writing teachers do not end there.

Teachers must also teach awareness of audience in teaching writing. Raleigh (1927) said:

> We are to write not to display our talents, or to tickle the sense with sounds, but to persuade or convince, to inform, to commend our views or proposals to particular persons - in short, to influence the behaviour of our fellows. (p. 19)

English teachers in particular have for too long been the only audience for whom students write. The usual result is that students face the teacher only in his role as an evaluator of what they write. While this role is necessary at times, it often has a negative influence on student writing, because it fails to prepare them for varied audiences.

Students could be asked to write for sharing with their fellow students, for publication in school or community papers, or for reading by audiences outside of the school setting. Britton et al. (1975) posit that:

> A highly developed sense of audience must be one of the marks of the competent mature writer, for it is concerned with nothing less than the implementation of his concern to maintain or establish an appropriate relationship with his reader in order to achieve his full intent. (p. 58)

Teachers could make use of the peer group as an audience. One way to accomplish this would be the implementation of a peer editing plan. Baker (1981) provides a very good guide for setting up peer editing in a regular classroom.

A further example of publication for teachers to use is the staffroom bulletin board. Why not put examples of good writing there for all teachers to appreciate? Besides these, teachers can have their students write for various literary contests, for job application, for information from government agencies and a host of others. The main object is to keep them busily writing and to give plenty of encouragement and advice as the writing unfolds.

Beach (1979) found that teacher evaluation and correction of drafts had a positive effect on writing quality for high school students (during the writing process, but not at the end). Thus teachers must be very willing to intervene in the writing process, if and when called upon to do so.

In the meantime, the teacher should be seen to be writing along with the students. Only in this way can the teacher serve as a model for them, and only in this way can s/he realize the difficulty of the writing task s/he has set for his or her students. The teacher must be willing to share the results of his or her writing so that students may see that his or her work, though not perfect, represents what an experienced writer can accomplish.

The very last thing the teacher needs to consider is the evaluation of a student's writing. Evaluation is such an important aspect that I will discuss it as a separate issue.

CHAPTER V

HOW WE CAN EVALUATE

I do not write as I want; I write as I can.

W. Somerset Maugham

The Need for a Definition of the Term "Good Writing"

How to evaluate written language has long been a source of concern for researchers and educators alike (Hall, 1981).

Machine scorable tests can measure vocabulary usage, capitalization, punctuation and spelling, but written language can only be evaluated by human judgement, a notoriously unreliable measure. A few recent developments, however, may help teachers evaluate writing more accurately. My purpose in this section is to present and discuss these developments, with a view to improving evaluation.

Acting on the premise that evaluation of writing involves pointing out what is good in a piece of writing, I set out to discover what constitutes good writing. With that problem in mind, I conducted two brief surveys - one of the literature, and one of a sample of students attending summer session 1987 at Memorial. I will discuss each of these surveys in turn and then point out their commonalities.

What Published Writers Say About the Qualities of Good Writing

The writers represented in this survey are a mixture of scholars, novelists, essayists, educators, philosophers, and humanists. Upon compiling a list of quotations from their writings, I was surprised by the common terminology they used to define the term "good writing". I compiled a list of descriptors used by each writer and noted how often the same terms, or terms with a very similar meaning, recurred throughout the sample. I was later struck by the number of these same terms used by fellow students to define the term "good writing". (These similarities are shown in graphic form on page 74.) There appeared to be a fair degree of consensus among the samples on the qualities of good writing, but I will discuss that later.

The most frequently occurring description in the literature was "communication" or some variant of the word.

Sartre (1965) advises writers to "deliver messages, to voluntarily limit their writing to the involuntary expression of their souls" (p. 26). Flesch (1949) suggested that good writing was that which is easily understood by the common man. Maugham (1964) said that "good prose should resemble the conversation of a well-bred man" (p. 37). Murray (In Burack, 1987) echoes this idea of conversation. "An effective piece of writing is a dialogue between the writer and the reader, with the

writer answering the reader's questions just before they are asked" (p. 297). Claiborne (1983) says the same thing in different words. "The aim of writing is not simply to be understood, but to make it impossible to be misunderstood" (p. 297). Sontag (1966) also supports the idea of writing with a view to one's audience. "One never writes without wanting to be understood and without considering one's probable audience on a given occasion" (p. viii). Raleigh (1927) said that "[written] language is a means of communication. It has work to do." (p. 20).

Donovan, (In Tate and Corbett, 1981) also dwells on the importance of tailoring the writing to the audience.

> A writer must make a conceptual leap in seeing himself as a manipulator of language which is both part of and indistinguishable from him. His writing should be neither masked nor maskless but an artful way of making others see what he sees. (p. 222)

Several writers have made special mention of the content of good writing. Raleigh (1927) says "The merit of writing depends first of all on the motive, the background of fact, the situation that governs the composition" (p. 21). Macrorie (1968) listed these contents of good writing: "economy, saying more in fewer words" (p. 17) and "vivid, accurate details" (p. 18). Diederich (1974) felt that good writing should deal with "true feelings, fresh perceptions, independent thinking, on however humble a level" (p. 87).

Still other writers seemed to place emphasis on the style of good writing. Twain (1961) posits that "instinct

with naturalness [is] a most noble and excellent feature in composition" (p. 5). Macrorie (1968) used such describers as "honest, vigorous, sensuous, unsentimental, fresh, metaphorical, memorable and light" to classify good writing (p. 20).

In contrast with those who equate good writing with good communication, there were a few who believed that good writing is more personal and selfish in its effect. Allen (1982) says "A piece of writing is valuable if it- or the effort the student has to put into it -- serves to improve its author as a human being" (p. 16). Thoreau, cited in The International Thesaurus of Quotations, (1970) says, "Nothing goes by luck in composition. It allows of no tricks. The best you can write will be the best you are". Sontag (1961) puts a different slant on this personal aspect of writing, picturing the writer as a suffering artist. "For the modern consciousness, the artist (replacing the saint) is the exemplary sufferer. And among artists, the writer, the man of words, is the person to whom we look to be able best to express his suffering". Sheldon, (In Burack, 1987) says of the personal side of writing, "Every good writer that I know writes to please himself, not to please others" (p. 63).

Several writers have spoken rather figuratively about writing. Orwell, (In Davison, Meyersohn, and Shills, 1978) says that "good prose is like a window pane" (p. 9). His subsequent elaboration reveals that he feels that good

writing is free of the writer's personality. Emerson, speaking in a similar indirect fashion, says, "In good writing, words become one with things" (cited in The International Thesaurus of Quotations, 1970). One presumes that Emerson referred to the power of imagery in good writing.

Hendrix (In Whiteman, 1981) tells us that "The question of what is good writing cannot have an absolute answer, though there are features of better writing that are nearly absolute" (p. 66). Among these "near absolutes" he lists surface correctness, comprehensibility, suitable word choice, meaningfully stating one's purpose, and originality.

Perhaps the most appropriate and meaningful definition of good writing, especially for students at all levels of education, is that offered by Judy and Judy (1984). "There is no good writing, only good rewriting" (p. 126).

What Memorial University Students Say About the Qualities of Good Writing

Without pretense at conducting scientific research, I decided to survey a sample of students at Memorial University during summer session 1987. My aim was to get at least fifty responses to the question, "What comes to your mind when I mention the term 'good writing'?".

I approached students in the Queen Elizabeth II Library with my survey, and got generally cooperative receptions. Each person was given a 3 x 5 card and invited to write a brief response. Through some quirks in communication, eight cards never did get back to me. Thus my sample of students numbers forty-two, probably a large enough number to justify the sort of observations I want to make.

Some of my respondents wrote from one to three sentences, while many others simply listed points. I have examined these with a view to seeing whether any of the student responses featured terminology similar to that used by the published writers previously cited. There was a strong resemblance in many instances. One student said, "Good writing is the ability to clearly and concisely pass on information to a reader. It is the ability to inform and not overload". Many other responses included some aspect of communication. Some attempted to be literary, such as this one: "To me, good writing is a coherent collection of phrases and/or sentences to express an idea, making the utmost use of imagery". A typical listed response looked like this: "readable, containing no jargon, easy to understand, concise", or this: "clear, easily understood, interesting, grammatically correct".

Each of my two surveys was enlightening, but when set next to each other they were even more so. In the table to follow I have displayed terms common to the published

writers and to the student sample, and indicated the relative incidence of each term in each of the two surveys.

Summary of terminology used in defining the term "good writing"

Published writers (n = 16)

Student sample (n = 42)

Terms	Number of references to terms	
	Literature Sample	Student Sample
Content related:		
communication	8	24
audience understanding	3	35
clarity	2	19
accurate detail/diction	1	6
factual/truthful/original	7	17
rewriting	1	0
Sub-totals	22	101
Style related:		
imagery/metaphors	2	6
grammar/mechanics	1	15
coherent	0	6
concise/economical	2	13
Sub-totals	5	40
Totals	27	141

While not at all an exhaustive source of data, the above table does present some findings relevant to my purposes here. You will note that I have grouped the terms arising out of the survey under the two headings of "content related" and "style related". My purpose in doing so was to highlight any possible differences in perceptions of style versus content in my survey. These differences are evident, and they have implications for the evaluation of writing. I have highlighted two of them here.

First, it appears that both published writers and the students in my sample tend to equate "content" with good writing. Of 27 writer responses, 22 were content related, while 101 of 144 student responses were content related.

Second, a greater proportion of students than writers stressed grammar/mechanics as features of good writing. For writers, only 1 of 5 style related responses related to grammar, while for students 15 out of 40 responses related to grammar/mechanics.

The relative importance given to content (and to communication of that content to an audience) should suggest something to teachers as they prepare to evaluate student writing. It may be telling us that most of the weight assigned in evaluating should be for quality and completeness of content, rather than for style (or mechanics). This would seem to be in line with what

current theorists in the field have been saying about evaluation.

My second observation, beyond the difference between writers and students on the importance of grammar, is worthy of note. It may be that these students put more stress on grammar because high school teachers led them to think that way. On the other hand, one might argue that writers worry less about grammar because they know their writing has to be proofread by an editor. Whatever the case, those are not the main points to be stressed here. What is to be stressed is that I have found a consensus among published writers and a sample of summer students at Memorial University (most of whom are practicing teachers) about some of the general features of good writing. I wish to continue the discussion with a statement of my own views on what constitutes good writing. From thence I will proceed to a personal impression of evaluation as I have seen it unfold in some Newfoundland schools. That will be followed by a review of what the literature says about evaluation schemes, and then by my own thoughts on the evaluation of writing.

A Personal Definition of the Qualities of Good Writing

Good writing is essentially good communication. A writer is no more than a person with a view of the world, who wishes to share this view with another person, often

called the audience. Thus the first criterion of good writing is that it passes on a message.

To develop further my own view of good writing, I need to consider three aspects of the message that permits it to be passed on successfully.

First, good writing has a readability level suitable to the age and syntactic maturity of the intended audience. Too low a readability level may insult some audiences, while too high a level may frustrate the audience's attempts to receive the message.

Second, good writing is based on standard English, except where dialect or colloquialism are meant to add flavour to the piece.

Third, good writing either contains original thoughts of the writer, or acknowledges that some ideas are borrowed from another source. (With that in mind, I hereby acknowledge that my foregoing definition of good writing was framed by my experiences in Frank Wolfe's classes).

The apparent consensus on the attributes of good writing belies the reality that there is little consensus on how to evaluate writing. Teachers tend to feel very uneasy about the act of evaluating writing, and this may well be a factor in the general avoidance of writing. The fear of evaluating writing has already been mentioned. Along with other factors, such as workload, subjectivity

of marking and a lack of suitable criteria, it can lead in turn to a lack of writing.

I want to explore further the notion of a lack of suitable evaluation criteria, because I believe this to be a major stumbling block to writing. It seems to me that teachers have no consistency in their evaluation criteria, certainly not across the province, and often not within a particular school. Diederich, French and Carlton (1961) showed that different evaluators either overstressed or ignored one or more of the following factors in evaluating student compositions: content, organization, diction, style and mechanics. I intend to explain how the same factors are either overstressed or ignored in many Newfoundland high schools.

Personal Impressions of Evaluation in a Newfoundland High School Setting

Various evaluation schemes have been in vogue in our schools at different times. The first of these might be termed "error counting". The teacher reads a composition, counting the "errors", and subtracts the number of errors from 100 to get a percentage score. Thus a composition with 36 errors would get a mark of 64%. A variation of this scheme would have the composition lose half a point for each error, so that the one with 36 errors would be awarded 82%. Content appeared to be virtually ignored. Diederich et al. (1961) found that many high school

teachers of English read for mechanical errors and for very little else, and Diederich (1974) cites an example of error counting in which a teacher said "I just count the number of mistakes and subtract that number from 100" (p. 29). I suspect that these were not just isolated cases in the United States, and I know from experience that they have occurred in Newfoundland high schools.

Perhaps about 17 years ago, the notion of "creative writing" spread across the province. Suddenly, for many teachers, it ceased to matter that a composition had mechanical errors. All that mattered was that the student be allowed to express himself "creatively".

Gradually, teachers began to become aware of an apparent decline in the ability of students to write paragraphs or longer pieces of prose. Reactionaries, who had never quite acquiesced to the notion of "creative writing", cast all the blame in that direction. "Not enough rules", they cried. "How can students write an essay if they do not know a subject from a verb?" They demanded a "return to the basics". (Perhaps no one bothered to notice that more students were now being retained in schools, and that many of these were the weaker learners. High schools never before had known such students, because they used to drop out in grade nine. Hence we had a probable cause of a decline in writing ability.)

As the controversy over the basics versus creativity question began to subside, it seemed for a time that a truce had been declared, with a negotiated settlement. Compositions would now be assigned a dual mark, part for content and part for grammar and mechanics. The value assigned for content varied from a low of 50% to a high of 90%, depending on at what point of the continuum of "creative" to "basics" the particular teacher seated himself. It also varied as a function of a subject area, i.e., content teachers gave more value for "correct content". This sort of division of marking had some critics. Barzun and Graff (1985) said:

> True, when one discusses what a piece of writing is trying to say one often distinguishes its "contents" from its "form", but this separation is unreal; it is a feat of abstraction. Actually, we know the contents only through the form, though we may guess at what the contents would have been had the form been more clear cut. (p. 272)

Meanwhile, longer compositions were not often required and perhaps often avoided.

The reorganization of the high school curriculum added a new dimension to the debates about writing. Teachers were now advised to use "the writing process", which generally means the attention to stages of writing such as prewriting, writing and revising. Prewriting required lots of talk, brainstorming and topic developing. Writing required rough drafts and organizing of thoughts. Revising included editing and rewriting. Some teachers adapted to the process approach very readily, but many

others ignored it. On the one hand, process writing was said to be too much like "creative writing", and on the other it was thought to involve too much "idle" time, which led to discipline problems. Many teachers stuck with their traditional approaches to writing.

Consequently, the teaching of writing in many schools may well be still as inadequate as it was twenty years ago. That must change. Far too many functionally illiterate students are being sent out of our schools; there are far too many victims of the inadequate teaching of writing. Unless we do something about it, the problem will get increasingly worse.

What Is the Role of the Teacher in Evaluation?

Composing involves exploring and mulling over a subject; planning the particular piece (with or without notes or outline); getting started; making discoveries about feelings, values, or ideas, even while in the process of writing a draft; making continuous decisions about diction, syntax, and rhetoric in relation to the intended meaning and to the meaning taking shape; reviewing what has accumulated, and anticipating and rehearsing what comes next; tinkering and reformulating; stopping; contemplating the finished piece and perhaps, finally, revising. This complex, unpredictable, demanding activity is what we call the writing process. Engaging in

it, we learn and grow. Measurement plans for instruction or research should not subvert it (Cooper and Odell, 1977).

Given the complexity of the writing process as just described, it is most unfair for teachers and public examiners to expect students to write "on demand". The system of evaluation that inevitably follows that writing is also generally unfair to students. Yet the same evaluation system can be fraught with difficulty for teachers. Both the complexity of the writing process and the difficulty of evaluation tend to make students and teachers avoid it.

I have already discussed some ways of helping students to write, so now I will attempt to ease the load of teachers. If evaluation is a stumbling block for teachers, then it would seem worthwhile to discuss some evaluation schemes that have been used with varying degrees of success. This would provide alternatives to the teachers' present practices and at the same time provide for maximum student growth and learning about writing.

Before proceeding further, I must make clear the distinction between formative and summative evaluation. My beliefs about evaluation are grounded upon that distinction.

Summative evaluations are of the sort that most parents and administrators expect teachers to provide.

Everyone wants to see results from educational experiences, to quantify improvement in student abilities. Thus summative evaluation is conducted on end products, i.e., student writings, to ascertain whether students pass or fail, enter college, or take basic or advanced courses.

Formative evaluation is ongoing. Its purpose is not to assign grades or marks, but rather to provide future direction and motivation for the student to improve his level of performance. It consists of positive comments and mildly expressed criticisms, letting the student know how well he is progressing, without destroying motivation. Formative evaluation also helps the teacher evaluate his own performance. Thus, in terms of writing instruction, my personal predilection is towards formative evaluation. I share the belief with Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) that "The kind of improvement that matters most in writing workshops is also the kind that progresses at its own natural pace, not at the pace of instruction, and a kind that is extremely difficult to measure in its subtle manifestations over short periods of time" (p. 152). Donovan (In Tate and Corbett, 1981) supports this view of improvement in writing. "The writing we are looking for is not going to appear magically in any one essay ... but as a spiral progression of recovery and discovery" (p. 223).

Still, one cannot deny the reality that summative evaluation is demanded, and that it is essential, so the

need arises of making summative evaluation more humane and yet more defensible. A brief review of summative evaluations schemes follows.

Summative Evaluation

Weaknesses

Though notoriously unreliable, teacher evaluation of writing has long been the norm. Its unreliability stems from several inherent weaknesses. One of these is its propensity for bias - towards particular types of students or towards particular manners of writing. Diederich (1974) showed how evaluators can be influenced by their awareness of variables such as whether a student was honours or general, freshman or senior, male or female. Other influences on evaluation identified by Diederich included: teacher political persuasion, teacher impressions of the student and teacher tolerance for certain types of errors. Diederich concluded that in evaluating writing teachers found whatever they expected to find. In other words, he says that teacher evaluation of student writing is too influenced by teacher subjectivity.

A second weakness of teacher evaluation is that teachers tend to apply more attention to surface errors than to content. Hall (1981) reports that "assignments have been given which have emphasized content and ideas, yet student papers have been returned filled with red

marks for poor spelling, punctuation, and grammar" (p. 5). I have seen that same sort of phenomenon in my teaching experience. Many teachers, when asked to read a student's writing, instinctively reach for a red pen - before they begin to read. Some public examination markers struggle to avoid putting such red marks on student writings, because there they may only write in a numerical grade on each question. Leacock (1944) knew the folly of this system of evaluation when he said:

> What they (students) get ... is mainly negative ... It tells them what errors to avoid. But you can't avoid anything if you are writing nothing. You must write first and "avoid" after words. A writer is in no danger of splitting an infinitive if he has no infinitive to split. (p. 19)

That wisdom needs no further amplification, and it holds just as much truth for today as it did in 1944.

Hayakawa (In Judine, 1965) points out another facet of this fascination with surface errors. He laments that it leads the student to write uneasily and self-consciously; thus the fear of making errors leads to more errors, and also to stilted writing (p. 1). Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) believe that this concern with the technical aspects of writing "retards real development by encouraging linguistic timidity or a preoccupation with formal tidiness over intellectual growth" (p. 154).

I have witnessed this "linguistic timidity" in high school students. They are wont to believe that a tidy piece of writing would always be sufficient, and they are

very puzzled indeed when a tidy script gets only a low rating from a high school teacher. A frequent result of their puzzlement has been an aversion to writing. It seems that the proportion of students who protest that they cannot write increases with every year of exposure to school writing. I believe the trend should be exactly the opposite of that.

A third weakness of teacher evaluation of writing, as Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) suggest, is the influence on evaluation of the teacher's perception of his status. Thus, Knoblauch and Brannon surmise, "Many perceptions of quality or deficiency are little more than consequences of a disposition to regard texts (student writings) in a certain way to assert a privileged reader's right of judgment" (p. 164). Teachers appear to feel it incumbent upon them to be very critical of student writings, taking their prerogative to be critical, in the literal sense, to the extreme. Notwithstanding that, a teacher's perceptions of errors in a text often varies with his sense of the writer's authority (Knoblauch and Brannon, 1984). Hence teachers may be more tolerant of surface errors in the work of "good" students than in that of "poorer" students. In another case, they may mark a sentence fragment as an error in the work of a student, but accept it as correct in the work of an author such as Ernest Hemingway.

Teacher evaluation needs to be examined more closely if it is to be more efficacious as a form of summative evaluation. Nevertheless, teacher evaluation can have a more positive side, and that I will discuss later under the heading of formative evaluation.

Rating scales

A rating scale can be a useful tool for evaluators, particularly those whose inexperience may cause them concern about the criteria of good writing and about their ability to keep these criteria in mind while evaluating papers. A rating scale is basically a list of specific factors to be considered when eyaluating. One such scale developed by Diederich (1974) is based on a list of factors identified as significant by a variety of evaluators he had used in a now famous 1961 experiment. In that experiment, 300 papers written by college freshmen were evaluated by 60 readers from six occupational fields. A factor analysis done on their judgments of writing ability led to the factors presented in the table below (Diederich, 1974, p. 54)

Topic _____ Reader _____ Paper _____

	Low		Middle		High
Ideas	2	4	6	8	10
Organization	2	4	6	8	10
Wording	1	2	3	4	5
Flavor	1	2	3	4	5
Usage	1	2	3	4	5
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
Handwriting	1	2	3	4	5

Sum _____

The scale is very simple to use. The teacher-evaluator has to circle one number after the name of each quality to indicate his rating of the paper on that quality. Diederich explains that "double weight was given to ideas and to 'organization', because these were the qualities his evaluators cited most frequently as features of good writing" (p. 54). The range of points available on this scale vary from 10, if all features are rated low, to 50, if all rated high.

Diederich's scale appears to be a very functional one as it stands, but I would use a modified version of it in my school. I would add two more headings such as "quality of content" and "communication with audience"; and give

more weight to each of these. In either case, it would be important to spend time training teachers in the use of such a scale. Of particular importance would be the need for reaching consensus on terminology involved in the scale. This need was demonstrated by Barritt (In Stock, 1983). He conducted a study in which a group of teachers each evaluated a series of essays, and then compared their reasons for each score. He found that some evaluators were using different terms for a single concept, while others were using a single term for different concepts (p. 83). I fear that such a confusion exists in various schools and believe that it is an important prerequisite to using such a scale to check for harmony in basic concepts of writing and evaluation.

Thus in the Diederich scale just presented, it would be important to discuss not only what each of the quality related terms means, but also to reach consensus on what degree of each quality is indicated by the designations "low", "middle" or "high". How many spelling errors would it take, for example, to be rated low on spelling?

A simpler version of a rating scale is presented in Cooper and Odell (1977). This dichotomous scale requires an evaluator to check either "yes" or "no" to a series of short statements about the writing. The scale, taken from Cooper and Odell (1977), is reproduced below.

Score Sheet

	Yes	No		
Content I.	___	___	1.	Ideas themselves are insightful.
	___	___	2.	Ideas are creative or original.
	___	___	3.	Ideas are rational or logical.
	___	___	4.	Ideas are expressed with clarity.
Organization II	___	___	5.	There is a thesis.
	___	___	6.	Order of thesis idea is followed throughout the essay.
	___	___	7.	Thesis is adequately developed.
	___	___	8.	Every paragraph is relevant to the thesis.
	___	___	9.	Each paragraph has a controlling idea.
	___	___	10.	Each paragraph is developed with relevant and concrete details.
	___	___	11.	The details that are included are well ordered.
Mechanics III	___	___	12.	There are many misspellings.
	___	___	13.	There are serious punctuation errors.
	___	___	14.	Punctuation errors are excessive.
	___	___	15.	There are errors in use of verbs.
	___	___	16.	There are errors in use of pronouns.
	___	___	17.	There are errors in use of modifiers.
	___	___	18.	There are distracting errors in word usage.
	___	___	19.	The sentences are awkward.

The Cooper and Odell scale would appear to be very quick to score, with judgments so "black and white", about qualities of the student's work. I see a possible use for

the scale as a quick assessment form for everyday class writing. In this sense, it would replace numerical or letter grades.

A third version of a rating scale was developed by the Cleveland Heights City School District (Judine, 1965, p. 159). It appears on the following page.

This scale sheet, used in the Cleveland Heights high schools, has been used effectively in the hands of students as a means for noting progress. The sheet is attached to each theme the student hands in so that he has the opportunity to gauge his own work prior to having others read it. When compositions are returned, he sees at once from the scale those facets of his work that need strengthening as well as those in which he has improved. Student readers, whether individuals or in committees, find in the scale the general criteria needed to judge intelligently the themes they read (Judine, 1965, p. 159).

Each of these three rating scales has some merit, and I would recommend that teachers use any one or even all three at different times. The attractions of such a scale are threefold. A scale would save teacher time by making it unnecessary for him to write detailed comments on each paper. It would give a student a clear impression of his strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps most significantly, it would permit the training of students as peer editors, which would cut down on teacher workload and at the same time promote a team approach to learning.

Composition Rating Scale

Cleveland Heights - University Heights City School District

Assignment | Student | Date

Purpose

A. Content-50%

Convincing — Unconvincing

persuasive, sincere, enthusiastic, certain

Organized — Jumbled

logical, planned orderly, systematic

Thoughtful — Superficial

reflective, perceptive, probing, inquiring

Broad — Limited

comprehensive, complete extensive range of data, inclusive

Specific — Vague

concrete, definite, detailed, exact

B. Style-30%

Fluent — Restricted

expressive, colorful

Cultivated — Awkward

varied, mature, descriptive, smooth

Strong — Weak

effective, striking, forceful, idioms, fresh, stimulating

C. Conventions-20%

Correct Writing Form — Incorrect Form

paragraphing, heading punctuation, spelling

Conventional Grammar — Substandard

sentence structure, agreement, references, etc.

Standardized writing tests

Standardized writing tests do not really measure what they purport to measure, which is writing ability. Hall (1981) points out that "standardized achievement tests measure discrete subcomponents of writing, most commonly vocabulary knowledge, grammatical usage, capitalization, punctuation and spelling" (p. 4). This sort of testing is best known in the form of the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs), normally used to screen applicants to American colleges and universities. The SAT items are all multiple choice, easily scored by machines. Test results are easily converted to grade equivalents and percentiles. They appeal to parents and administrators who like to compare levels of student achievement within and between school years. Some theorists blame the SATs for a decline in writing abilities (Wheeler, 1979; Gooper, 1977; Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer, 1963). They argue that since college entrance exams do not require writing, then high schools will not give writing instruction, but rather teach to the SATs. This sounds to me like a very plausible argument. We do not have SATs in this province, but we have shown a considerable preference for short answer tests. The results here reflect those alluded to in the foregoing comments about SATs.

Primary trait scoring

Multiple choice tests cannot really measure writing ability, as more and more educators are starting to realize. As soon as more people began to believe that the best test of writing ability is an actual writing task, there arose a need for agreement on a system for scoring writing samples. One that was developed for the United States National Assessment of Education Progress was called primary trait scoring, billed as "the most reliable alternative to multiple choice tests of writing" (Cooper and Odell, 1977, p. 32). In preparing to use primary trait scoring, a group of teachers describe in detail traits or features which they feel should appear in students' writing, if the instructional program is working (Judy and Judy, 1981).

Cooper and Odell, 1977, state it a little more clearly:

> Primary trait scoring guides focus the rater's attention on just those features of a piece which are relevant to the kind of discourse it is: to the special blend of audience, speaker role, purpose, and subject required by that kind of discourse and by the particular writing task. (p. 11)

The scoring would consist of looking at each desirable trait and saying either "yes the trait is evident in the paper", or "no it is not evident". It takes into account the fact that a person may write perfectly well in one mode of discourse, but not in another mode. The key considerations in primary trait

scoring would be: "what was the purpose of this piece of writing"; "what is the specific feature of that mode of discourse"; and "is this necessary feature present in this piece of writing" (Lloyd-Jones, in Cooper and Odell, 1977, pp. 45-65).

The evaluator is then required to make a judgment about the relative degree to which the required primary trait is present in the writing, on the basis of points such as 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, with 0 indicating that the trait was absent and 4 that it was present to a high degree.

Primary trait scoring appears to be fairly complex to set up and administer, and it is. I would not prefer to use the system, but for different reasons. I feel that it would tend to make writing too fragmented, with possible hierarchies of ability in the order of "I can write good exposition, but you can only write business memos". That is admittedly oversimplified, but it serves to illustrate my point that writing of all kinds may be mastered by all students, and should be to the greatest extent possible. Also, primary trait scoring tends to assume that all other features of good writing have already been mastered, and are, in fact, present in the piece of writing being considered (Cooper and Odell, 1977, p. 32). I do not support so narrow an approach to evaluation, and do not feel that I could support its implementation in my school.

Holistic evaluation

For some people, at least, there is merit in the statement "the whole is more than the sum of its parts", and these people have a perception of some aspect of life in which that is true. Some evaluators of writing feel it to be perfectly descriptive of their view of what good writing is and of how it should be evaluated.

The concept was first developed by Diederich (1974) and is still run very much as he devised it. Large groups of students produce essays on the same topic. Evaluators are trained, through discussion of sample papers, to quickly read each essay and assign a value to the essay based on their perception of how well it compares with the samples. Each essay is read twice, and any on which the two evaluators cannot agree will then be read by a third evaluator. An evaluator has continual access to the samples to check his standards from time to time. The scoring is very reliable, with some claiming a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or better.

I experienced the holistic marking system as a member of a public examination marking board. There the system seemed different from that of Diederich's. We began with a brief training session, discussing and evaluating a few sample papers. Then the real marking process began. Each essay went over to a prereading table where one of two readers read it and placed it into one of four piles, representing four levels of quality. Four final

evaluators then took the essays to mark. The first task was to quickly decide whether the prereaders had placed it in the right category. If they apparently had not, the chief marker was called in to mediate. The four final markers dealt with papers in these ranges: the best papers to which were assigned marks from 20-25; the second best, which were assigned marks from 16-19; the third best to which were assigned marks from 13-16; and the worst, which were assigned marks from 0-12.

Thus each student's paper was given at least two readings by two different evaluators. In addition, the chief marker would recirculate occasional papers for a second rating to check our level of reliability, which was consistently very high. The student received the benefit of any dispute about marks on a particular paper.

The system of holistic marking has some value to it. It is a systematic approach to evaluation, its reliability is very high, and it does consistently rank-order student writings.

There have been attempts over the years to develop an essay scale. One such example was developed by the California Association of Teachers of English (Judine, 1965). The scale consists of five sample essays representing five levels of quality, an outline of criteria for evaluation, and a list of symbols used in the scale. The scale, taken from page 149 of Judine (1965), is presented below.

California Essay Scale

Section V: The Evaluation of Essays

I. Content: Is the conception clear, accurate, and complete?

- A. Does the student discuss the subject intelligently?
  - 1. Does he seem to have an adequate knowledge of his subject?
  - 2. Does he avoid errors in logic?
- B. Does the essay offer evidence in support of generalization?

II. Organization: Is the method of presentation clear, effective, and interesting?

- A. Is it possible to state clearly the central idea of the essay?
- B. Is the central idea of the paper as a whole sufficiently developed through the use of details and examples?
- C. Are the individual paragraphs sufficiently developed?
- D. Are all the ideas of the essay relevant?
- E. Are the ideas developed in logical order?
  - 1. Are the paragraphs placed in natural and logical sequence within the whole?
  - 2. Are the sentences placed in natural and logical sequence within the paragraphs?
- F. Are the transitions adequate?
- G. Are ideas given the emphasis required by their importance?
- H. Is the point of view consistent and appropriate?

III. Style and Mechanics: Does the essay observe standards of style and mechanics generally accepted by educated writers?

A. Are the sentences clear, idiomatic, and grammatically correct? (for example, are they reasonably free of fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices, faulty parallel structure, mixed constructions, dangling modifiers, and errors of agreement, case, and very forms?)

B. Is the sentence structure effective?

1. Is there appropriate variety in sentence structure?

2. Are uses of subordination and coordination appropriate?

C. Is conventional punctuation followed?

D. Is the spelling generally correct?

E. Is the vocabulary accurate, judicious, and sufficiently varied?

Section VI: Symbols Used In Marking The Essays

agr	agreement	p	punctuation
cap	capitals	red	redundant
cs	comma splice	ref	reference
d	diction	rep	repetitious
fc	faulty comparison	sp	spelling
frag	fragment	str	sentence structure
gr	grammar	t	tense
mm	misplaced modifier	trans	transition (needed)
o	remove punctuation (usually comma)	x	obvious error
pl	plural	//str	parallelism
pv	point of view	v	insert word
pred	prediction	()	make one word

After each of the sample essays there are critical comments and a general description of features of that level of quality in an essay. As expressed in Judine (1966, p. 152), here are the characteristics of an essay placed at the top level.

Essays in the first level of the scale are usually characterized by lively intelligence: the writer's thought flows easily from one idea to another; it grasps and expresses relationships among ideas and between abstract ideas and concrete realities. Sentence structure is usually both fluent and complex; vocabulary is extensive, and spelling is good. Such essays characteristically have excellent content, are frequently rather long, and have fully developed paragraphs. These qualities seem natural to a good mind. A young person's mind, however, may be somewhat undisciplined; thus the usual faults of essays in this range are in vocabulary, which, being ambitious, is sometimes experimental, and in organization and sentence structure, which may occasionally become a trifle confused. The quality of punctuation seems to vary considerably among the best papers.

The use of this scale requires a strong knowledge of composition. The original creators of the scale felt that it could be used by high school students, but I would be very careful about trying that. Yet it would be an excellent way to provoke staff discussions of the features

of good writing and of evaluation standards as its creators say it would (Judine, 1965, p. 148). I especially like the stress they give to the need for positive evaluation, and I wholeheartedly support their contention that a top essay does not have to be absolutely flawless. One of my concerns with evaluation, particularly on public examination boards, is that it seems almost impossible for a student to get full marks on an essay. When one considers the complexity of writing, and the constraints of time imposed by public examinations, the standard for good writing seems beyond the range of some very capable students.

This concludes the discussion of summative evaluation schemes. I make no claim that the review is exhaustive, but it does present the variety available in the literature to date. From this point I will move on to a discussion of those methods of formative evaluation which I believe ought to be the focus of all teachers, and of English teachers in particular.

Formative Evaluation

The process of writing engaged in by a student reminds me of a flight to the moon. For each new pilot/writer the task at first seems almost formidable. A great amount of time and effort are expended in planning and organizing before the spaceship (i.e., writing) is launched. The eventual goal is pretty clear, but along

the way certain "mid-course-corrections" have to be made so that there is no straying off course. As the process moves along, the pilot/writer learns through his or her experiences things about himself or herself in his or her new environment. S/he also learns how to react from the comments, questions and directions of ground-control (the teacher). At the end of the mission (the writing process), there is the debriefing and synthesizing of new knowledge that will make this flight more meaningful, and all succeeding flights easier and even more productive. Ground-control (the teacher) only monitors the flight; it does not control the flight!

The importance of the teacher's role

The role of the teacher in the writing process and in the learning of the writing process is a crucial one. The teacher must have a personal liking for writing, a love of student writings, and some background in composition theory. S/he must also be enormously patient, understanding and approachable, with a real sense of how difficult writing can be for even the most experienced of writers.

It may well be that we cannot really teach writing at all. As Frank Wolfe says: "At best we can hope to be coaches of writing". Thus instead of teaching writing, we can at best hope to foster writing in our students. How should one foster writing? I would begin the process with

a talk about some of the purposes of writing and how it has relevance far beyond the classroom. Some of the points I raised in chapter two of this thesis would equip me for that talk. I would talk about my love for writing and attempt to elicit from students some ideas about how the world would be different without writing. This might even lead to a writing assignment which would grow out of the talk and ensure that each student had the chance to think about how writing becomes a worthwhile activity.

Always, I would strive to make writing a positive experience. It might be useful to discuss the role of grammar and mechanics in writing, to assure the students that ability in that aspect of writing will grow with experience. At this point it might be useful to relieve fears about errors in writing by telling the students that errors can be a sign of growth. Bartholomae (1980) and Shaughnessy (1977) showed us that errors often occur when students make attempts at new vocabulary or new sentence structures. This might also be a time to introduce to students the notion of writing as a way of learning. "Teaching, from this vantage point, no longer stresses giving people a knowledge they did not previously possess, but instead involves creating supportive environments in which a competence they already have can be nurtured to yield increasingly mature performers" (Knoblauch and Brannon, 1984, p. 15).

Two phrases in that reference warrant elaboration. First, the notion of "creating a supportive environment" is a key one for teachers. You can only create a supportive environment slowly, by being patient, to hear each student's point of view, and by giving frank, helpful advice as the student writes. You must delay summative evaluations as long as possible, and use formative evaluations as the student moves through the process of writing. The second notion alluded to above is that of "a competence they already have". As was pointed out earlier, writing is a very natural human response to a need to communicate, nearly as natural as speech itself. That knowledge can be used to help every student believe that he can also write. After all, every person has thoughts, and every person has a desire to share thoughts with another. We ought to look upon writing as Leacock (1944) did, "This, then, is what is meant by writing - to have thoughts which are of interest to other people and to put them into language which reveals the thoughts" (p. 4).

With this in mind, the teacher can simplify the concept of audience and its role in writing. Barzun and Graff (1985) say, "The effective writer is one who is alive to the overtones of the words he uses - that is, who is conscious of his audience and of the aims of the particular communication" (p. 294). An honest teacher will tell his or her students that making one's intentions clear to an audience is the most challenging part of

writing. Barzun and Graff (1985) put it this way: "Not only is it difficult to make words agreeable to read and impressive enough to remember; it is also difficult to make them reveal the exact contours of the facts and thoughts one has unearthed" (p. ix).

Varied audiences

Having written, the student will want to share his thoughts with someone, but not with just anyone. Who then, does he or she share with? The usual audience for most student writing is the teacher, but he or she may not be the best audience. Teachers represent a threat because they hold the power of judging and marking. The best audience may well be the peer group. Baker (1981) set up a system of peer evaluation in one school and ran it very successfully. (This can be an effective means of getting formative evaluation into the classroom.) Baker (1981) says: "Formative evaluation refers to the responses, reactions, suggestions or comments that the writer may receive from varied sources regarding his writing" (p. 18). Teachers ought to provide exposure to a wide variety of audiences, but the first audience should be the peer group. Ong (1982) tells us the importance of having students write for varied audiences.

> Written words sharpen analysis, for the individual words are called upon to do more [than spoken words]. To make yourself clear without gesture, without facial expression, without intonation, without a real hearer, you have to foresee circumspectively all possible

> meanings a statement may have for any possible reader in any possible situation, and you have to make your language work so as to come clear all by itself, with no existential context. The need for this exquisite circumspection makes writing the agonizing work it commonly is. (p. 104)

Peer group evaluation has two particular advantages. It provides the varied audience and it gives immediate feedback as to whether the audience has understood the writing. A weakness of teacher evaluation is that teachers have so much to attend to that feedback is often too long delayed.

Baker (1981) points out the importance of this feedback when he says "By providing feedback between drafts, formative evaluation may offer the student the motivation and guidance he needs to engage in meaningful revision of his own writing" (p. 18).

Naturally, the teacher may not leave everything to the peer group alone. He or she must encourage students to accept the views of their peers, to take risks, and to understand the need for revisions. I have found the rewriting aspect of the writing process most difficult to get students to attend to. Maybe each classroom should have these words of Barzun and Graff (1985) written across the walls. "No one, however gifted, can produce a passable first draft: writing means rewriting" (p. 36).

Teacher-pupil conferences

Conferencing with pupils is a necessary element of the writing process. Graves (1983) tells us that conferences can be useful at any part of the writing process - before writing, during writing, or at the end of each draft. He reminds us that the purpose of conferencing is to help the student focus on meaning, not to correct errors, at least not until a final draft is in progress.

In conferencing, I find it important to listen to the student. To get the student talking, I ask questions about his or her work. Such questions include: What do you wish to say? What ideas have you thought about? Are all your ideas important, or what can you leave out? The idea is to draw solutions to writing problems out of the student, and not merely to tell him or her what to do.

Given the numbers of students in typical classes, it should seem obvious that not much time can be given to each student. A minute or two will suffice for most students. Some will not need help at all, or can even help weaker students.

Measuring and acknowledging growth

Students will want some "proof" of their growth in writing, but that need not be a call for summative evaluation. The teacher can write evaluative comments on papers, or give them verbally during conferences.

Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) say that teachers can assure students that they are "making progress - as defined by their willingness to take risks, listen to readers, make revisions, and offer advice to other writers" (p. 165). They caution us that "these signs of improvement may appear quickly even if improved performance takes longer" (p. 169). We must learn to be patient with student writers, and to focus on improvements, as small as they may appear to be. The Bullock Report (1975) had this to say of teachers' reactions to writing:

> A child should not be made to feel that it does not pay to take risks. The teacher's first response to a piece of writing should be personal and positive. Only after responding to what has been said is it reasonable to turn to how. (p. 167)

Thus the teaching of grammar and mechanics is to be done only as the last part of the writing process.

Students must be told to collect all their writings in a portfolio or writing folder. Thus they or their parents could trace any improvements as they occur. Furthermore, the teacher could use the accumulated writings to make summative evaluations at the appropriate intervals or terms.

The role of content area teachers

The content area teacher may well wonder whether any of this discussion relates to him. The answer is yes, because every subject has a need for writing, and the kind

of writing varies with the subject, as Stock (1986) tells us.

> The world of schools and schooling ... is a world of rich and varied communities and their languages. Subjects (disciplines) not only have their respective vocabularies but also their different ways of introducing discussions, shaping questions, framing problems, posing solutions, expressing concepts. Those who contribute to a community are inevitably those who feel empowered to do so. As students in their roles as writers and contributors enter new social, academic and professional communities, they do so with a language that of necessity will be reshaped and recreated by the new settings in which they find themselves. (p. 101)

Thus while it may be the responsibility of English teachers to teach writing skills in general, it surely is the responsibility of content area teachers to teach manners of writing peculiar to their subjects. It is even more important that content area teachers provide frequent and appropriate thought-provoking questions for students to write about. Baker (In Baker, Barzun and Richards, 1971) tells us, "Only by writing can we see what we think; only by writing can we hold our thoughts still enough to compare them with each other, and with experience; so that we can think them over" (p. 15).

Recommendations

In light of the issues raised in this study, I would recommend the following:

1. That Memorial University of Newfoundland should institute a series of composition courses, at least one of which would be compulsory for all student teachers,
2. That school districts should set up committees to develop policies for writing across the curriculum and to explore the use of writing as a mode of learning.
3. That the Newfoundland Department of Education, perhaps in co-operation with the Newfoundland Teachers Association, should set up a series of writing projects wherein practicing teachers could learn to write and learn to teach students to write.
4. That public examination authorities should pursue all of the following possible courses of action:
   i. Have all senior high school English courses evaluated at the school level.
   ii. Drop the requirement for students to write essays on demand in such a short time with little time to revise.
   iii. Have public examination markers drop their artificially high standards which do not allow many students to score highly on essays, because of the error factor inherent in the essay time constraints.

5. That teachers re-examine their questioning strategies to ascertain whether they may be guilty of promoting rote learning to the detriment of higher order thinking skills.

If, working together, we can get that sort of notion through to our high school students, writing and learning may well take on a whole new meaning for all of us. The benefits could accrue for all in this province to share.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Terms of Reference: Writing Committee of the Port Aux Basques Integrated School Board

1. The committee shall construct a questionnaire whose purpose is to define the teachers' current philosophy in writing.
2. The committee will carry out indepth research on the quantity and types of writing presently being done in the district, and make the results known to teachers.
3. The committee will examine current correction and grading policies in the district and make recommendations for change where necessary.
4. The committee will study samples of educational research related to the effect that the teaching grammar, mechanics, and usage has on writing, and outline clearly the position of grammar in the teaching of composition.
5. The committee will outline the steps that should be followed in the composition process.
6. The committee will make specific recommendations on the frequency and quantity of writing that should be done.
7. The committee will carry out detailed study on the English course descriptions for the reorganized high school curriculum and make recommendations regarding the in-service necessary for teachers to understand

and implement the philosophy of writing expressed in these courses.

8. The committee will study the concept of "Language Across the Curriculum" and make recommendations about the way in which the teaching of language (listening, speaking, reading and writing) can be integrated into the content areas.

9. The committee will be expected to organize and present district-wide in-service (grades 7-12) on the topics studied.

10. The final recommendations of the committee will be used by the School Board in defining its philosophy of writing for the Junior High and High School grades.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Writing Questionnaire

(To be completed by all teachers from grade 7-12)

GRADE TAUGHT: _____ SUBJECT(S) TAUGHT: _____

TEACHING CERTIFICATE: ✓ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE: _____

I. QUANTITY OF WRITING

1. Indicate how often you as a teacher write

   (a) purely for the fun of it (frequently, seldom, never)

   (b) as a model for students (frequently, seldom, never)

   (c) as part of your professional duties (frequently, seldom, never)

   (d) others (please be specific) _____

2. How often are students writing for different audiences? (Indicate percentage approximately)

   (a) the teacher ____

   (b) their peers ____

   (c) for general public (for publication) ____

   (d) for parents ____

   (e) others (please be specific) ____

3. How often are students asked to do in class writing?

   (a) frequently ____

   (b) seldom ____

   (c) never ____

4. (a) Keep track, for 5 days, of the number of questions you have the children write answers to - in class _____
- out of class _____

(b) Keep track of the number of fill-in the blank type worksheets the children do in 5 days. _____

(c) Keep track of the number of writing assignments - essays, paragraphs - anything larger than one sentence answer to a question in 5 days. _____

5. What % of time do you:

(a) "give notes" _____

(b) have children make their own _____

6. FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS: In 5 consecutive language lessons, estimate % of time spent on:

(a) creative writing _____

(b) mechanics skills - grammar and syntax, punctuation, capitalization, etc. _____

(c) discussion _____

(d) expository writing _____

II. TYPES OF WRITING

1. Which type of writing do students in your subject do most often?

(a) one sentence, factual recall _____

(b) single paragraph _____

(c) multi-paragraph _____

(d) others (specify) _____

2. (a) Does your school have a "school newspaper"?
_____ yes _____ no

(b) How often is it published? _____/per month

(c) What percentage of writing for the newspaper is done by students? _____/100%

III. EVALUATION

1: How often do you evaluate paragraphs and essays assigned to your students?

(a) every assignment _____

(b) every other assignment _____

(c) now and then _____

2. What procedure do you use for evaluating writing completed during class time? (Please be specific.)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Rank according to the weight you give in the evaluation of student writing. 1. Very Important, 2. Important, 3. Of little Importance, 4. Negligible

(a) good handwriting _____

(b) spelling _____

(c) capitalization _____

(d) punctuation _____

(e) sentence structure _____

(f) content _____

4. How often do you read answers and evaluate for grading purposes?

   (a) once weekly _____

   (b) 2-3 times per week _____

   (c) more often (specify) _____

5. In a written assignment, does you marking reflect both content and mechanics?
   _____ yes _____ no

   Assignments are grades

   _____ % content _____ % mechanics

6. How often do you consult with other teachers on your respective marking policies?

   (a) always _____

   (b) frequently _____

   (c) seldom _____

   (d) never _____

7. To what extent are students invited to question your marking of written assignments?

   (a) always _____

   (b) some assignments _____

   (c) never _____

8. <u>For English Teachers</u>: Describe your grading system for essays; weight given to ideas, mechanics, grammar; letter or % grade; one or two grades per essay, etc.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9. For content area teachers: Do you "take off" for spelling, grammatical, and mechanical errors when you grade assignments? If so, explain what you do. Do you "take off" for mechanical errors on exams? If so, explain what you do. Do you feel there should be a uniform district policy about "taking off" for mechanical errors in assignments? in exams? A uniform school policy?

IV. OTHER CONCERNS IN WRITING

1. How often are writing exercises preceded by meaningful talk? (frequently, seldom, never) Exactly how do you stimulate meaningful talk?

2. Do you require students to answer questions in sentences? _____ yes _____ no

3. How do you teach grammar?

   (a) by using children's errors _____

   (b) by following the sequence of the language books _____

4. (a) How often do students edit their own writing <u>in class</u>?

frequently _____

seldom _____

never _____

out of class? frequently _____

seldom _____

never _____

(b) How often do you require students to rewrite material?

seldom _____

never _____

Specify the usual reasons that you ask students to rewrite.

5. In the "teaching of writing" should the onus be placed on Language teachers or should it be an "across the board" responsibility?

6. How often do students get to read their written materials out loud to the class?

(a) often _____

(b) seldom _____

7. What percentage of time is spent in writing

   in class _____

   out of class _____

8. Complete this statement. "The best thing a teacher could do to help his students improve their writing would be..."

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

A Report on the Writing Committee of Port Aux Basques and Its Findings

About four years ago, the Port Aux Basques Integrated School Board, through the auspices of the District Superintendent, set up a committee to study the state of writing in grades seven through twelve in the district. Chosen to comprise this committee were five teachers and two language arts consultants. The five teachers were a cross section of subject areas and grade levels from seven to twelve, with the chairman being the English department head of one of four schools represented.

This committee was presented with ten specific terms of reference (see Appendix A), and a general time frame of two years to complete the study. The long term objectives of the committee were to (1) conduct in-service on writing for all subject teachers, and (2) help develop a writing policy for the school district.

Early meetings of the committee dealt with interpreting the terms of reference, planning time frames during which each term's requirement would be met, and formulating a broad plan of attack.

The first three terms necessitated the designing of a questionnaire to see what policy (if any) was in place throughout the schools, within departments, or among teachers. Specifically, the committee wished to get

information on such things as attitudes toward writing; frequency of writing; the purposes for writing; and cross-disciplinary comparisons of writing.

The committee was aware that the honesty of teachers in reporting on our questionnaire might depend to a great extent upon their perception of what the questions and answers might imply about their teaching, or lack thereof.

With that in mind, we asked for no personal identification other than subject area taught, grade level, years of experience, and level of teaching certificate. The responses to the questions required the teachers to tell such things as the quantity of writing done by them and their students, the kinds of writing, types of evaluation procedures, time spent on writing, and general concerns such as the relative amount of attention to content versus mechanics in the teaching of writing.

While the results of the entire questionnaire were all very interesting, I shall highlight only a few of them, which pertain more closely to the theme of writing-across-the-curriculum and to the studies previously mentioned. I will look at several findings of the committee's study, and comment on each.

One of the least startling findings of the survey was that our teachers seldom write, as models for students, or for any other reason. Having teachers writing, despite research findings to the contrary, was not seen as an important aspect of a school's writing program. Our

committee felt there would be several advantages of having teachers write, and be seen writing by students. It would remind the teacher of how difficult it is to write on demand. It would help the student learn to discriminate between good and poor writing. It would, most importantly, help the teacher to keep his writing expectations reasonable, and in line with the maturity and experience of his students.

The writing that was being done was mostly intended for the teacher as evaluator. The problem is that this limited use of writing denies the student the opportunity to practice writing for different purposes and for different audiences. This problem is not unique to this school district, however, as it parallels findings of studies by Barnes, Applebee and Fillion, as mentioned in the earlier review of the literature.

Similarly, the finding that most writing consisted of short answer question responses was reported in studies by writers just mentioned.

Evaluation of writing was another area where the committee found disagreement among the ranks of teachers. The problem arose with two aspects of marking; first, whether the teacher should attempt to mark every piece of writing, and second, over whether a particular scoring "system" should or should not be used.

The committee found that most teachers who profess to teach writing attempt to evaluate (grade) each and every

piece of writing done by students. The attempt to evaluate all writing has weaknesses. Not only does such a system increase the tendency to write for an audience of one - the teacher as evaluator, but it also might tend to limit the amount of student writing to the amount a particular teacher found time or inclination to marks. It is just not necessary for teachers to mark every piece of student writing. As a matter of fact, some educators feel it unnecessary to even read every piece of student writing. The marking systems themselves were worthy of note.

Whether it was revealed to the students or not, it seemed that most teachers used some sort of dichotomous mailing scale, with one mark or portion thereof for content, and one mark or portion for mechanics. Thus, some of these teachers actually put a double mark on the student's paper, while others gave one mark that was a total of the two marks. What was interesting, if not downright disturbing, were the wide variations within and between subject areas in the percentage of the mark allotted to content. Content was valued from as low as 50% to as high as 90%, depending on the relative importance ascribed to it by teachers.

Only a very few teachers claimed to be adherents of a holistic scoring system. These seem to be in tune with modern literature, which seems to disapprove of a dichotomous scale of marking.

Judy (1983) says he is against the dichotomous marking system.

> We recommend against this practice because it creates an unnecessary schism between writing and content. Instead, apply content criteria- Are the facts right? Are the observations sound? Is the message accurate? - and focus on writing only as it enhances or detracts from the content. (p. 67)

Particularly among English teachers and generally among all teachers, there appeared to be widespread confusion of the terms "revising" and "editing". It seemed that most teachers felt the two words were interchangeable, such that for the teachers, and hence for their students, revising was no more involved than rewriting with the object of cleaning up minor mistakes in spelling or mechanics.

As in other, more respected studies, there was much evidence of content area teachers feeling that the teaching of writing was the responsibility of English teachers. Ironically enough, many of the same teachers, when asked to indicate what they felt would improve writing ability suggested more frequent practice in writing. What was ironic was that the same teachers had admitted to using writing only intermittently and had said that they saw little need to teach writing skills.

The overall achievement of our survey was that it showed local teachers to be no worse than counterparts in other jurisdictions in their philosophy of writing. It goes without saying that they were also no better, so we

can presume that in both cases improvement is possible and desirable. Realizing that it is possible to change things only in a very slow, painstaking way, our writing committee took the stance that improvements would be made only through evolution, not revolution.

This process was begun with a one-day writing workshop conducted by the members of the writing committee, with the assistance of two imported experts, Mr. Hayden Leamon from the University of New Brunswick, and Mr. Blaine Hatt, a high school teacher, also from New Brunswick. These two gentlemen ran the early part of the day as a writer's workshop, asking each teacher present to write "on demand" on an assigned topic, with only a starter sentence being given.

This was a humbling experience for each one of the teachers. Their cries of protest at the difficulty of writing in such a situation sounded strongly familiar. Comments ranged all the way from "I can't write on this topic", all the way to "I'll write it, but you had better not read it out loud". One could close his eyes and imagine himself in a typical class of high school students!

The reluctance to begin writing was matched by the slowness to complete it; but neither of these could match the refusal of teachers to share their writing by reading aloud, when they were asked to do so! Score one big point

for the idea of looking at student writings more mercifully, and assigning it more tactfully.

Later sessions in our day-long workshop dealt with recent trends in the teaching of writing, including peer editing, journal writing, the writing process; and specific suggestions for writing in school classrooms.

Once the day was over, and people had a chance to reflect on the workshop, it became clear that many of them, content area teachers especially, felt that the workshop held little relevance for them or to their course area. Such comments only served to reinforce what our questionnaire had told us. For many teachers, writing is just not a major concern.

What was, and is, a need for such people is to have further training in writing so that they can hopefully begin to realize its value to any subject area.